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The Giant Rifleman; OR, Wild Life in the Lumber Regions.

BY OLL COOMES,
AUTHOR OF "DEATH-NOTCH," "DAKOTA DAN,"
"RED ROB," ETC., ETC.

THE PROLOGUE.

THE great, green woods of Michigan sung their eternal melody under a dreamy August night.

The murmuring rivers and slumbering lakelets reflected back the brilliant glories of the summer sky.

The great, round moon seemed to stand fixed over the valley of the Muskegon, as centuries before it had stood over the valley of Ajalon; and her mellow light falling to earth, garnished the green, feathery forest with a silver radiance, and shimmered on the bosom of the waters like burnished gold.

The majestic pines shook their emerald robes in the balm of that northern summer night, and murmured low and soft their endless complaint.

The night-jar screamed along the sky and panted his hollow wings against the pliant air.

The sound of human voices—the cries of childish joy and ripples of merry laughter, mingled with the steady roar of the water pouring over the Bull-rush dam.

The lights from half a dozen cabins peered dimly out over the river from the shadow of their retreat under the clustering pines.

The bark of a watch-dog, ever and anon, started the echoes in the woods as it bayed the far-off cry of a wolverine.

Frogs croaked along the margin of the river, and insect wings droned through the night.

Six long canoes lying upon the river just below the Bull-rush dam, contained a score of merry people. Men, women and children were there to spend the evening hour in fishing after the day's hard work was done. Pleasant was the flow of soft words that passed from lip to lip, boat to boat; and clear and happy were the

peals of childish laughter that came over the water.

The scene was a pleasant one, and no happier hearts nor more romantic scenes were ever praised in Venetian song. No fears seemed to fetter the buoyant spirits of the hardy lumbermen, their happy wives, and frolicsome little ones. The voices of nature around them, the fragrant summer air, and a sense of each other's joy seemed to have thrown around them the glories of Paradise.

But hark! A sound suddenly breaks in upon their ears. Every voice becomes hushed, and every ear is bent in the attitude of listening.

A loud splash in the water is heard despite the roar of the dam.

Then the figure of a man is seen cleaving the moonlit waters as he swims rapidly out toward the boats.

Every eye is fixed upon the form gliding so swiftly across the waves, for some strange intuitive fear seems to fill each breast with a sense of approaching disaster.

The swimmer approaches the nearest boat. The occupants see that his face is dark, and



"WHAT IS IT, CAP'T'N?" THE OLD HUNTER ASKED, HIMSELF GROWING UNEASY AT THE CAPTAIN'S EMOTIONS.

The Giant Rifleman.

darker still is the mass of long hair floating on the water above his head. He is an Indian—a friendly Chippewa. He looks up and speaks. His face wears the look of wild excitement, and his words are spoken with an awful meaning.

"Go! go!" he exclaims; "it is death to remain!"

There is no reply save the dip of a dozen paddles.

The prows of the canoes are at once turned toward the shore.

Hushed now are those merry voices, silent are those prattling tongues.

The loud blows of an ax suddenly ring out clear and distinct, and above these are heard a dozen unknown voices crying out:

"All together!"

"My God! it comes from the lock of the dam!" cried a strong voice in one of the boats.

Scarcely had his words died on his lips ere a sound, as though the earth was bursting asunder, rent the night.

Then from the lips of the lumbermen and their loved ones, rose a shriek of despair.

Some fiends incarnate had cut the locks to the dam, and throwing open the floodgates, hurled a mighty avalanche of water upon the little party, burying men, women and children beneath it, and sweeping them into eternity.

With the roar of a tornado the flood sweeps on—a great cloud of foam and spray rolling up in advance of it like the breath of a demon.

Not a human voice is heard; nothing save the receding roar of the flood breaks upon the night. The woods echo the rush of the tide, and the earth trembles beneath its mighty tread. But its wild fury is soon spent. Gradually its roar dies away in the distance like a far-off rumbling. The river seeks its level, and flows on as smoothly as it did ere the Bull-rush dam disturbed its quiet.

Not a sign of human life is visible.

One by one the voices of nature resume their song.

The boom of the night-jar's wing is again heard above the forest pines.

The watch-dog that bayed the wolverine, now howls piteously by the broken dam.

The moon glides down and hides her face behind a cloud, for she had not witnessed the triumph of Israel over the Amorites.

Darkness settled over the face of the earth.

The lights in the Bull-rush cabins burn to their sockets and go out.

And now shadowy figures skulk here and there among the huts like assassins.

The night passes away and day dawns; but nothing save that same piteous howl of the watch-dog breaks the awful silence that reigns over the tenantless houses of the Bull-rush lumbermen.

As the day advances, vultures appear afar off down the river wheeling and circling in the air, their greedy eyes fixed on the human forms bloating and blistering in the August sun.

Night again comes on apace, and as she drops her mantle over the earth, let us draw the curtain over the Bull-rush Tragedy.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE LOG-RAFT—WHO FIRED THE SHOT?

On the principal Black river of Michigan, and some twenty or thirty miles from the great lake, a huge raft of logs was slowly drifting along at the will of the sluggish tide. It was intended for the mills at South Haven, and although late in the season for rafting, there was an ample force of water to bear the great boom steadily forward.

The raft was an immense affair for the Black river, being about ten rods wide by twenty in length, and containing in all more than an acre of logs. These logs were firmly lashed together, side by side, and long poles and slabs pinned transversely across the ends of the outer tiers. There was but one layer of logs, and this was half sunken in the water by its own weight. At the stern of the raft a helm was attached, and with this one man alone kept the great boom on its course.

In the center of the raft a large tent was arranged upon a platform raised a few inches above the logs, which were wet and slippery. The tent was the shelter and home of the raftsmen. It was provided with a sheet-iron stove, a few rude stools, a box that answered the double purpose of a table and provision chest, and a couple of pallets made of skins and blankets.

The raft was in charge of five men. Four of them were in the tent, and the fifth one at the helm. They were all strong, hardy-looking fellows, as most all river raftsmen usually are. They were dressed in garments made of the coarsest material, and in plainest style, though no two were dressed alike. All wore high-topped-rubber boots to enable them to walk over the wet, slippery logs with ease and comfort.

All were comparatively young men—their leader, whom they addressed as captain, being the eldest. He was probably in the thirties somewhere; and being a man of rather fine personal appearance, he bore a striking contrast to his associates. A large, full blue eye gave him an expression indicative of a kindly nature, as

well as of considerable force of character. His general features were those of a handsome man. A long, flowing brown beard and a heavy mustache lent additional strength to his appearance; though his head, upon which the hair had been closely cut, displayed a slight preponderance of animality. In form he was, truly, a model of physical manhood; but, despite these favorable endowments, there was an air of reckless abandon and hidden deceit about him that eclipsed, in a measure, all the better gifts of nature.

The four men set around the table, engaged at cards. Before them was a bottle from which they occasionally drank.

"Josh," said the captain, as he took up the cards and began shuffling them, "I was just thinking about—"

"What, captain? that swamp angel?—old Cranberry's daughter?"

"Not at all, Josh; I was thinking of where you and I were, about two years ago this time."

Jack made no response, though his companions saw, as he bent his eyes in reflection, that his hand trembled as he threw down the ace of trumps and caught Abe Brannon's king.

A momentary silence ensued.

The captain of the raft repeated his question. Josh Myers colored, and a perceptible change came over his face.

"Captain," he finally said, "I am fully aware of what you allude to; and if you can talk 'bout anything else, do so; I assure you it will be just as agreeable to me as twenty lashes would be to you, at least."

The captain laughed a dry, husky laugh.

"Anything for a little fun," he observed; "rafting, you know, is dull work, and we must say or do something to keep up excitement. It will be to-morrow night before we get down to South Haven."

"When we do get there we will have a high-lonesome with the boys," replied Myers. "We'll run over to Oshkosh, we will, and have a royal time before we go back to Camp Spencer."

"No dissipation, boys; no dissipation, or I'll bounce every blackleg of you," returned the captain. "I won't have it; you fellows have got to brace up, quit swearing and drinking, and shave at least once in six months, and wash your faces once a week. Yes, sir, gentlemen; you've got to slick up in person and morals, or else get out of the wilderness."

"Whew!" whistled Myers, in apparent surprise; "what's comin' over the spirit of our captain's dreams? Had a presentiment, captain?"

The captain glanced up as though startled by the question.

"Why, no, you mullet-head," Abe Brannon put in; "don't you know that old Cranberry's daughter is going to queen it over Camp Spencer as the wife of Captain Randolph Spencer?"

"Certainly—beg pardon, captain," said Josh, taking up the bottle and placing it to his lips; "but here's to you, the swamp angel, Old Huckleberry and all creation."

He drained the bottle to its dregs, then took up the cards to deal.

"Josh, you mustn't get drunk, for it's your turn next at the helm."

"Blow the helm!" blurted Josh. "Budd Harris's running that; so who keers for expenses or whether this old raft floats up or down the river?"

"Two years ago—" began the captain, but here Josh broke in, saying:

"Please let two years ago go to the deuce; my nerves need rest; they're not made of iron, and so if you don't want a first-class mutiny right here, don't mention the past to yours truly, Joshua Myers."

"But I had a presentiment, Josh."

"Dancin' dervishes! if you're going to talk about that, I'd like to have a presentiment, too, of—well, about two months' wages, and then you can say, 'good-by, John.'"

The captain again laughed at Myers's restlessness.

Again the bottle was filled from a jug in the corner of the tent, and all drank; but the captain drank lightly. His men could see that something weighed heavily upon his mind. Josh Myers alone had some idea of what it was troubling him.

The game of cards went on, and so did Josh Myers's tongue. The latter ran incessantly, and was rendered more voluble by frequent lubrications from the bottle. Josh was quite a wit among his companions, and a droll remark from his lips suddenly evoked an outburst of loud laughter. Before silence had been restored, a card in the hand of the captain was suddenly snatched from his fingers by an invisible power, and thrown on the table. At the same instant a sharp splinter of wood penetrated the cheek of Zeke Morris, forcing a cry of pain from his lips.

The captain picked up his card, and, to his surprise and horror, saw a round, ragged hole torn in the center.

"By Judas!" burst from his lips, "what does this mean?"

"A bullet done it, captain; look there!" said

Myers, pointing to a ragged perforation in the top of the oaken table where a bullet had struck it—ranging obliquely downward, entirely cut off sight.

The faces of the raftsmen became stamped with surprise and wonder; and in a moment all were upon their feet and out of the tent. They glanced around them, and toward either shore. On the right, high bluffs rose several hundred feet above the level of the stream, and from these heights the shot had no doubt been fired down into their tent.

The man at the helm could tell them nothing more than that he had heard the report of a gun over on the bluff among the bushes.

The captain and his men grew uneasy; they could not understand the meaning of the almost fatal shot. If it had been fired with murderous intent, who had done it? This was the question that passed from one to the other. The captain shook his head gravely.

"It surely can't be one of Bertraw's men?" he said.

"I don't know," responded Abe Brannon. "Bertraw and his whole gang of lumbermen are as envious of us as the irig of the katydids. They are all French Canadians, and are naturally of an ugly and jealous disposition—quick to resent an injury, and slow to correct a wrong. You know we have never agreed, captain; and after we tore out that floodgate on Deer Creek, with which they had, in violation of all lumbermen's river rights, obstructed our passage, they threatened us. And now, perhaps, they think there are only a few of us, and all drunk at that, and that it'll be a good time to bu'st our floodgates."

"As true as I ever find out that it was one of Bertraw's men who fired that shot, just as true as I get back to camp alive, will I take my whole gang of choppers, loggers, and raftsmen, and march down on those Canadians; and if ever blood ran free on Michigan soil, it will be then and there," and with this delivery the captain drew a breath of relief.

"Bravo! Glory! Second the motion!" shouted the redoubtable Josh Myers.

"For fear we might be boarded by some enemies," said the captain, "let every man see that his revolvers are ready for instant use."

When all had examined their weapons, and the excitement had somewhat abated, Josh Myers took out his knife and began digging after the bullet that had been lodged in the top of their table. The wood being hard, and the bullet having sunk deep, it required several minutes to accomplish this task; and when it was finally done, all were surprised to find it very small, of a peculiar color, and but little bruised in coming in contact with the oaken table.

"By the living wonders!" exclaimed the captain, in astonishment, the moment his eyes fell upon the ball; "that, boys, is a copper bullet!"

"Dancin' dervishes!" cried Josh; "then none of Bertraw's men fired the shot."

"No: but I daresay that bullet came from the copper regions of the northern peninsula," replied the captain.

"Well, that's a question that's debatable, captain. But whoever fired the shot, be he man or red-skin, or nigger, he has an object in using that kind of a bullet," observed Joshua Myers.

"Yes, and whoever the unknown marksman is," said Brannon, "I tell you he puts them in right nice. I don't believe that shot was intended to kill any of us."

"I am not so sure about that," replied the captain; "he range was a long one for a gun of so small a caliber; and yet the bullet could not have missed me an inch. I am of the solemn opinion that mischief—yea, murder—was intended; and hereafter we must keep on the alert, for I now have a presentiment that we will hear again, and that to our sorrow, from this unknown marksman."

CHAPTER II.

STRANGE NIGHT VISITANTS.

The captain of the raft and his companions seated themselves in their tent again, but not to engage in cards. They were too deeply absorbed over the mysterious shot to play; and as they discussed the matter in serious tones they kept a close watch along either shore for the marksman.

The man at the helm was finally relieved by Abe Brannon, and, as two men would have to remain up through the night, Josh Myers and Budd Harris laid down to obtain a few hours' sleep before the night-work came on.

The captain was one of those eccentric individuals given to presentiments. He was a man of some education, yet he was a little superstitious, which either came of a guilty conscience or long association with men of rude habits and untutored minds. It has been said that the influence of those around one will naturally draw his mind into the same channel, with their preponderance of animal magnetism; and as the captain's associates were men without education, perhaps he was partaking of their nature. But, be that as it may, he became more and more uneasy as the day drew to a close, and going out of the tent, as if to give free range to his thoughts, he paced up and down the raft in silent meditation. And ere he was aware of the

fact the shades of night were settling around him. Retracing his steps to the tent, he drank a couple glasses of liquor, then sat down and ate a cold lunch.

Shortly after dark Budd Harris went to the helm, while Josh Myers with a lantern was sent forward to look out for obstructions, for other rafts were on the river, and as some raftsmen, especially those with small rafts, were in the habit of tying up at night, there was danger of getting wedged between the banks when running into one of those stationary booms.

Night finally set in dark and foggy. Not a breath of air was stirring. Afar off over the hills, the weird song of nocturnal voices were heard. With a gentle murmur the recoiling waves dashed against the sides of the raft, and swashed and plashed between the logs. A few fire-flies trailed their glow through the darkness—even more brilliant than the lantern bobbing about on the forward end of the raft.

Abe Brannon and Zeke Morris retired to rest, soon after their relief came on, and in a few minutes were wrapped in slumber. The captain sat down, for he had no desire to lay down; sleep with him was out of the question. An empty bottle served the purpose of a candlestick, while another, that was not empty, answered the captain's inordinate thirst for liquor. He sought relief for his excited mind in frequent draughts of the fiery liquid; but he was only feeding the demon of fear instead of driving it away.

Thus he had spent nearly an hour when Myers finally came to the door in a great hurry, his face blanched and his teeth fairly chattering. He motioned the captain to the door, and when they were outside he drew him still further away from the tent and then said:

"Captain, do you b'lieve in ghosts?"

"Ghosts? what do you mean, man? are you scared out of your senses?" demanded the captain.

"Answer my question, won't you?" returned Josh, with considerable emphasis.

"Well, no; I don't believe in ghosts, of course," answered the other, though he manifested uneasiness in the very words he uttered.

"By the dancin' dervishes! what was it I seen then?"

"Where—when?"

"On this raft not five minutes ago."

"Well, what did it look like, Josh?"

"Exactly like a woman in a black hood and robe."

The captain forced out a dry, husky laugh.

"You are jesting, Myers," he said.

"I'll swear it, before heaven and earth, captain, that I saw her as plain as I see you this holy, sanctified minute."

"Did you speak to her?"

"No; before I could git my heart out of my throat, and take breath, she vanished—floated away into the darkness like a cloud."

"You must be mistaken, Josh—laboring under an optical delusion," persisted the captain.

"I hope I may never see the sun rise if I didn't see a woman," declared Myers.

"You m'ny think so, but still it may be only a freak of imagination. However, I will go with you and help search the raft over. It may be some one—yea! it may be the unknown marksman, that has boarded our raft under cover of this foggy night."

Side by side, and with no little trepidation, the two advanced and began searching the raft over, never taking into consideration the fact that the light they carried would warn an enemy, if one was upon the raft, of their approach, and thereby enable him to escape. Nor would an enemy have to leave the boom to elude the eyes and ears of the two men, since it was large enough for a person to dodge about at pleasure.

The raft was provided with four small skiffs—one being placed on each side and one on each end, to be used in case of emergency, which cases often arise. These boats they found in their place; nor did they find any other in which a foe had crossed over to their raft, as they had expected they should.

The two men made the circuit of the boom without discovering any trace of Myers's ghost; and having convinced themselves that nothing, nor any one, was about, Josh returned to his watch and the captain to his tent.

The latter felt somewhat relieved of his feelings of uneasiness by their finding the raft clear; still he had recourse to the bottle on the table before him. He took a big drink of the liquor, and smacked his lips as though he had, for the first time, detected new flavor about it.

"By Judas!" he exclaimed, holding the bottle up between the light and his eyes, "it can't be that the boys have been putting herbs into the jug; it tastes a little queerish."

Finding no sediment in the bottle, he replaced it in the provision-chest; then leaning back, he rested his head on his palm, and again gave way to reflection. His eyes soon closed, and his head began to nod. The candle burned low—almost to the neck of the bottle in which it was fixed. Silence reigned within the tent—silence reigned without.

Brannon and Morris were sleeping soundly, as was the captain, also, when suddenly a figure appeared in the doorway. It was a small figure,

which one would have taken for a woman's. It was clothed in a sort of robe, or cloak, and hood of a light gray color. Over the face was a black veil, yet a pair of scintillating eyes blazed through its filmy folds, as they were darted here and there over the tent.

For several moments the figure stood motionless in the doorway, looking around the dimly-lighted apartment.

But at length it advanced with noiseless step, and paused before the slumbering captain. Then it put out a hand that was small, shapely and white, and taking hold of the captain's long beard, lifted it slowly upward, exposing the throat.

This act, under ordinary circumstances, would have wakened almost any man, had the touch been that of mortal hands. But the captain slept on. Either those hands were spiritual hands, or else he was under a power that he could not shake off.

With his long beard raised from his breast, and his white throat exposed, a great livid scar, extending from among the beard on the right jaw down across the throat was revealed. And as the eyes of the veiled figure rested upon this scar, a cry escaped its lips, and the barrel of a tiny pistol flashed from beneath its cloak.

At this juncture, Abe Brannon, awakened by the cry, sprung to his feet. The act prevented the murderous intention of the unknown, who turned and fled out into the darkness.

Brannon darted out in pursuit; but the darkness was so intense that he could see nothing, and so returned to the tent, roused his companion, and yelled at the captain. But the latter made no sign of waking. Brannon seized him by the shoulder and shook him violently; and by this means succeeded in arousing him from his stupor. In a few brief sentences, Brannon narrated what he had seen, which greatly alarmed the captain. He started up, rubbed his eyes, and glared around him as if in confusion of mind. Then he swore furiously at his men, and at once sent them out in search of the mysterious intruder. As soon as he was alone, he turned, and glaring down at the bottle in the corner, exclaimed:

"By heavens! that liquor has been drugged!"

Like a madman, he then dashed out upon the raft, dipped up some water from between two logs in his hands, and bathed his feverish brow. This done, he paced to and fro across the raft to quiet his nerves and allay his sudden fears. He could see Myers moving about with the lantern on the forward end of the float, but all was silent now as the tomb!

Finally the captain returned to the tent. The candle had, by this time, burned so short that the light was spluttering in the neck of the bottle, but in its dim, flickering light he discovered a piece of paper and a pencil lying upon the table, which were not there when he went out. Of this he was positive. Some one had been in the tent since he had gone out!

The captain started back amazed. He glared around the tent like one terrified; and while his eyes were on the side of the tent, he saw something flash down the canvas. He knew that it was the polished blade of the knife, whose keen edge had cut a long slit in the side of the tent. Then, almost instantly, a huge hand, clasping a murderous-looking revolver, was thrust through the slit into the tent, while above the hand appeared a bearded face and a pair of deadly, blazing eyes.

The captain was paralyzed at the sight of the latter.

He felt their rays of diabolical enchantment numbing his very heart. His head, already dizzy and confused by liquor, seemed to be spinning around and around. A thousand horrors flitted vaguely across his mind.

The muzzle of the revolver that seemed like a circling tube of fire, appeared to approach and recede like a tantalizing demon in a horrible dream.

"Man!" suddenly spoke the stranger, in a tone that was as terrifying as his blazing eyes—"man, if you value your life worth the saving, do as I bid you; before you lies a pencil and paper; take up the pencil and write—write, sir, I command it—write, or die!"

The captain mechanically took up the pencil in a hand that trembled like an aspen.

"What would you have me write?" he asked, in a tone that was a failure to appear calm.

"Write these words: 'With the muzzle of a revolver at my head, I am forced to write these words to save my life!'"

The captain bent over the table and nervously wrote the words.

"There, sir," he said, when he had completed his task.

"Sign it!" said the demon at the slit.

Again the captain bent over the table; but he hesitated and looked up.

"Sign, sir, I command you—sign it or die!" was the prompt and forcible entreaty.

With a muttered oath, the captain wrote beneath the words already written, the name, "Randolph Spencer."

"That'll do—pass it here, quick!" exclaimed the hideous taskmaster.

Captain Randolph Spencer handed him the paper, and as he placed it in his hand, their eyes

met, and to each it seemed as though an electric flash passed between them.

At this very juncture—while the two stood face to face—the sharp report of a rifle rung out upon the night, and a groan of mortal agony came up from the forward end of the raft. The sound seemed to break the spell that enslaved the very soul and body of Randolph Spencer, and he started as if from a dream. He seized his own pistol and raised it, but that demon's face was no longer at the slit. He rushed out into the darkness and listened. He heard the excited voices of his men at the lower end of the raft—nothing more. A startling thought flashed through his brain, and with an imprecation, too horrible to repeat, he started toward them.

On the way a shadowy figure swept past him. He challenged it, but there was no answer, and he fired his pistol in the direction it had gone. Further on he met Abe Brannon hurrying toward the tent.

"What's the matter down here, Abe?" he questioned.

"Captain," and the man spoke in a husky tone, "Josh Myers is dead!"

"Dead!" exclaimed Spencer.

"Yes; he was shot down by the hand of an unseen enemy—an enemy aboard this raft."

"My God!" groaned the captain, pressing his throbbing temples with both hands, "then our lives are all in peril. There are two enemies, at least, aboard this raft. One was at the tent when the shot that killed Josh was fired."

"Yes, and I tell you, captain," said Brannon, positively, "there is a woman on our raft, too. I see'd her in the tent—I know I did; and she would have killed you if I hadn't jumped up and scared her away. Then, I've see'd her twice out here. She darts around over these slippery logs as though she went on wings. Oh, I tell you thar is no use talkin', captain; this raft is haunted."

"Haunted the devil! then the ghosts are material beings sent up from the depths of perdition. Go bring poor Josh's body to the tent—be in a hurry, for there is work before us."

The body was brought and laid in the tent.

On examination it was found that he had been shot through the head. The ball had entered near the center of the forehead, and passing through the head, had lodged at the back just under the skin. The captain, in his examination, felt it, and with his knife removed it.

To the surprise of all, the bullet had been but little dented, and as Spencer wiped the blood from it, a cry escaped his lips.

It was a copper bullet!

"Ah!" cried the startled raftsmen, "it is as I feared—again have we heard, and to our sorrow, too, from that unknown marksman!"

A silence profound as the grave followed his words, and as if to add to the silence, that which was still more emblematical of death, the light sputtered and flared in the neck of the bottle, then sunk and went out—leaving them in shadows—dark and dismal shadows that seemed to have ushered them into that endless void of Eternity.

CHAPTER III.

"THE DEMON HEAD! DID YOU SEE IT?"—A DOCUMENT.

FOR fully five minutes Captain Spencer and his men stood in silence and darkness, speechless and dumb with a vague horror. But presently the captain rallied from his stupor and lit a fresh candle. He glanced around him as its light spread, to assure himself that no enemy lurked within the tent.

"Boys," he said, "we must renew our search on this raft: I know there must be enemies lurking upon it."

They all went out and renewed their search, and when Captain Spencer passed round by the helmsman, he stopped and told him of Josh Myers's death. The man was so startled by the news that in his excitement he neglected his duty so far as to let the raft drift out and lodge against the bank. And there they were—for the night at least. And a long, dreary night it was—with the body of poor Josh lying before them—a terrible reminder of the unknown danger that lurked round them.

As soon as day dawned, Josh was taken ashore and buried on the banks of the river, with no little feelings of sadness and regret. Then they went to work to put the raft afloat. For awhile it seemed as if they were doomed to remain there, and they were only too glad when the huge float swung clear of the bank and moved slowly away.

To their regret, a slow, drizzling rain set in with the night; and had Abe Brannon, who was now at the helm, not known every crook and turn in the river, it would have been totally impossible for him to have kept clear of the banks.

An hour after night set in, the man on watch forward discovered a light some distance ahead of him. At first he took it to be a will-o'-the wisp, but he finally discovered that it was approaching; and in a few minutes more a canoe with three occupants touched the raft forward.

Budd Harris challenged them, and in reply received these words:

"It's all right if this is Captain Spencer's raft. I am James Trimble, of South Haven, and these fellows are my friends."

"All right, Mr. Trimble; the captain's been looking for you to meet us," replied Harris.

The men landed and drew their boat upon the logs. Then Harris conducted them to the tent.

"By gracious, Jeems," exclaimed the captain, "I am delighted to see you here to-night. It's rather gloomy in here alone, but then it couldn't be helped, for I have to keep all my men on guard to prevent demons from boarding us."

"What?" exclaimed Trimble, setting his lantern on the table and removing his gum coat.

"Sit down, and I'll tell you all," said the captain.

Trimble sat down. He was a man of some five-and-thirty years of age, with a steel-gray eye and rather prominent features. Aside from his vulgar display of jewelry he had the appearance and address of a gentleman. But the truth told, he was the most notorious gambler in the north-west, and by this profession and some others, had accumulated quite a valuable property.

Trimble and Captain Spencer had been friends for years—they had grown up together, and were now joint owners of a large tract of timber-land on the South Black river. Trimble knew about the time his friend was to be down with the boom, and had come up the river to meet him, partly on business and partly on a pleasure excursion.

Spencer soon narrated the events that had occurred aboard the raft the previous night; then he hunted a couple of glasses from the provision chest and filled the bottle out of the big jug in the corner, when the two drank to each other's health.

Trimble's companions had gone out and joined the raftsmen in their watch, for rafting was a novelty to them.

"Now, captain," said Trimble, when the raftsmen had concluded his story, and they had drank, "now I want to tell you my story, and I assure you it is no more cheering than yours."

"Then drink again before you begin, Jeems."

"Well, I will," and they drank once more.

"Now," continued Trimble, "I was in Kalamazoo two weeks ago, and while seated in the bar-room of the hotel there, an Indian, or French half-breed, came in and inquired if a young man named Darrall had stopped there recently. The clerk pointed him to the register for the information, but he told him he couldn't read and went out.

"You say he inquired for Darrall?" interrupted Spencer.

"Yes; and the name made me a little uneasy, though I don't see why it should."

"Of course not," said the captain, sipping at a fresh glass of brandy.

"Well, the fact of it is, it did make me uneasy, and I determined to know what that ignorant lout had to say to Darrall; so, I got Billy Jarvis to follow him and pass himself as young Nathan Darrall. He got the Indian into a saloon and filled him to the neck with whisky, then made himself known. Had the Indian cross-questioned him he might have seen that he was an impostor; but then the red-skin was too drunk for that, and presently he said:

"Me come way from Mackinaw to find Nathan Darrall—me promise Thomas Thoms that me come and give him a letter, for Thoms was to be hung next day for killin' a friend when drunk; and said he couldn't die without confessin' a great wrong he did to the Darralls, and making reparations for the same. He said he had concealed some papers once that would be of great value to the Darralls, and no one else—"

"Ah! those notes and that mortgage of course!" exclaimed Spencer: "fools that we were that we ever permitted that man to touch them papers."

"But he told us they were destroyed—that he burned them."

"I know he did; but we'd ought to have known that Thomas Thoms was a great liar."

"Well, we trusted him; but it seems he buried the papers and now sends a map, with instructions to the same in a mutilated condition, telling the Darralls where to find the buried papers."

The captain brought his fist down upon the table and uttered an oath. Then his face brightened up again, and he asked:

"Have you that map and instructions, Jim?"

"Yes, thank the Lord; but I can't make head nor tail out of it, for a slip has been torn off of each end. I presume the Indian did it to light his pipe, for he had just about that much sense. Billy Jarvis accused him of it, but he denied it and slunk away; but here is the paper," he said, producing a worn and crumpled document and spreading it out before the captain. "Now," he continued, "this, written on the back of the paper, is all I can make out:

"Friends, on the inside ov this ere paper is a map and instruktions that will tell ye wher to find them Spencer Trimble notes and mortgages. May God bless you is the prayer of one soon to die."

"THOMAS THOMS."

"And there," said the captain, turning the paper over, "is the map and instructions. What

can you make out of it? You see both ends have been torn off, leaving no sense, whatever, to the reading."

Captain Spencer emptied his glasses, moved his chair closer to the table, and then gazed upon the paper.

The captain carefully examined the map, and recognized every bend in the three Black rivers so far as sketched.

"I tell you what, James, that fellow understands those rivers well; but there is nothing here to indicate the place where the papers are concealed. But now let me see what this reading says: 'on the black river-mouth of th'south bran a sharp be that bend is buried oak tree may God find then—Thoms.' Well, I can make no sense of the right side, so let's try the left—'main between the e north and hes there is nd and in the papers under a e in a tin box—help you to, Thoms.' Well, one can't make head nor tail of that jumbled mess, true enough. The biggest portion of the reading is torn off, and I don't believe we can ever get at the meaning."

"Well, it won't do to let it out of our hands. Some fool might study out the missing links, and then—"

"We'd be paupers. It'd take more than we are now worth to lift a fifty thousand mortgage. Land, you see, has greatly depreciated in value within the past year; besides we have cut millions of feet of timber off the tract we mortgaged. It's true, the widow Darrall and her son Nattie are poor, but then they haven't the business facilities or faculties to handle fifty thousand dollars, and so we might as well have it as for some one else to cheat them out of it. Nevertheless, I should like to know the secret of this torn paper."

"It's no odds to us so it remains a secret, captain."

"None at all, so here—drink to the widow's health and prosperity, Thoms's success in perdition, and our good luck."

They filled their glasses to the brim, clinked them together, and raising them to their lips drained them to the dregs.

"Now, James," said Spencer, "wouldn't it be just as well to reduce this paper to ashes—cremate it?"

"I was just going to suggest that. Here, I have some fine cigars—light one with the paper."

The captain took the cigar and placing it between his lips rolled up the paper and thrust it over the blaze of the candle. But before it had caught fire a huge hand and arm, that must have belonged to a giant, was pushed suddenly into the tent through a rent in the canvas, and the paper was snatched from Spencer's fingers.

"My God! it's gone! did you see that hand? That demon's aboard us again!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE BEE-HUNTERS.

OUT where the rays of the summer sun beat down unobstructed, it was hot and sultry; but in the forest, under the arcing branches of the stately pines, a cool breeze toyed with the green drapery of the boughs. A balmy fragrance, sweet as that of the gardens of a sunny clime, pervaded the silvan halls of the grim old forest; and this, with the weird and dreamy song of Nature heard upon all sides, conspired to fill the souls of the three men, reclining by the Black river's sweeping tide, with a vague longing, and that lulled their senses into quiet repose.

The three persons in question were professional bee-hunters, as their general outfit indicated. They were young men in the very flush of youthful vigor. The eldest was probably eight and twenty years of age, the youngest not more than eighteen. Their general appearance and address denoted no little mental and social culture, though there was an air of easy abandon about them that declared them to be a spirited and rollicking set of fellows, free from the strict requirements and social formalities of civilization—free to roam at will—to hunt, to fish, to pour out the exuberance of their young spirits in seasons of endless pleasures and adventures in the great green woods of Michigan.

Frank Ballard, the eldest of the three, was a man of rather prepossessing appearance. In form he was about medium size and straight as an Indian. His eyes were dark brown, large and mournful in expression. He wore his hair cut close, displaying a well-balanced brain. A light brown mustache shaded his expressive mouth and gave additional strength to his fine, manly appearance.

Edward Mathews was about two-and-twenty years of age, and, like Frank, was possessed of a well developed physique, and features that were indicative of great force of character.

Nathan Darrall, the youngest, was, in fact, but a boy in years; but in form no athlete ever possessed a more perfect development. He was not large, but compactly built; and wiry and supple as a young panther. His eyes were dark blue and full of youthful fire, vigor and mischief. He was not considered handsome, yet there was a natural, dashing gallantry about him that never failed to win the admiration of those with whom he chanced to meet. No jollier boy in all

Michigan than Nathan Darrall! His whole soul seemed a constant flow of good nature. And yet there was, mingled with these very traits of kindness and gentleness, a look indicative of a desperate spirit when aroused by anger, a fearless courage when face to face with danger.

The three were dressed in buckskin breeches fancifully wrought by the skillful fingers of Indian women. Green velveteen jackets and wide-brimmed hats completed their dress, if we except the yellow buckskin shoes on their feet.

Each one was provided with a rifle, a revolver and a sheath knife.

On the river, flowing at their feet, was a long bateau, in which was their outfit for bee-hunting, including a few cups of honey, three or four tumblers of green glass, and an ax and hatchet.

They were, under the direction of a guide, on their way up the river; but owing to the heat of the midday sun, which poured down upon the river, they had gone ashore to await the cool of evening in which to continue their journey.

Shortly after landing their guide had left them, in quest of game for supper, he being a professional hunter. Deer and turkey were in the surrounding woods in abundance, and it was not necessary for their friend to be away long; but when the hours wore slowly away, and the sun sunk behind the western pines, they grew impatient and uneasy.

"It seems to me Goliah has had ample time to kill a dozen deer and turkey," said Frank Ballard.

"I have an idea he hasn't killed one yet, else he would have been in before this," replied Nattie Darrall.

"I don't think he displays any great skill as a hunter—at least he hasn't done much since he's been with us," observed Ed. Mathews.

"I think he's too big for a hunter," declared Nattie; "then, besides, his mind seems always to be running on something besides game. Just like as any way he's got tired of us and given us the slip."

"Never," exclaimed Ballard, firmly. "I'll bet anything that he can be trusted through thick and thin, sunshine and shadow. But really, I would like to have reached Alleghan today, and spent the night in the Pottawattomie camp, with the old chief, Pokahgan."

"They say he has a handsome daughter," observed Mathews.

"Yes, and I'll guarantee Nattie will fall in love with her, and get that Roman nose of his spoilt by a mule's heel, in the shape of a rival's fist or little hatchet," added Frank Ballard.

"Humph! fall in love with the queen of Damomey," exclaimed Nattie. "I've never seen an Indian girl yet that could be compared to a mud fence with a bullfrog on it. But you fellows want to look out for your hearts, for if you have any admiration for a muley cow, you'll be sure to fall in love with an Ingin squaw. Why, I consider the red-skins a species of the bovine family."

"Why, Nattie, when did you enlarge your stock of information in natural history?"

"And don't you know they shed their coats like serpents?" continued Nattie. "Why, it's a mortal fact that when one gets a new suit of buckskin he builds up a fire in a circle, lights his pipe and sits down in the circle. The heat of the fire warms the grease and accumulation of real estate, and presently dirt, rags and all slip off, and he comes out, bright as a June rose, ready for his new suit. Now this is a fact—I know it. Bah! talk to me of love and beauty in an Indian camp!"

"There, by Jove!" exclaimed Ed Mathews, starting up; "that must have been Goliah's shot."

It was the sullen boom of a rifle that came resounding through the forest, and all started as if with sudden fear.

"Surely that was old Goliah's rifle," said Frank. "It can't be that he is in trouble and signaling for help."

"For the sake of a little exercise, I believe I will figure out that way and look after him," remarked Mathews, and shouldering his rifle he walked briskly away into the woods.

Nattie and Frank rose to their feet and listened intently for some sound that would relieve them of their anxiety and suspense; but they heard nothing save the rush and roar of Spirit Rapids to the north of them. Even the same-ness of this sound became so monotonous to the listening ears as to partake of the general silence. But, suddenly, the trample of feet was heard, and turning, the young bee-hunters saw a deer emerge from the shadows of the woods, and move down toward the river. It was a doe, rather small, but with a coat as glossy as silk. Its head was erect, its nose elevated, and its thin nostrils distended and quivering as though it scented danger.

It walked slowly, but with proud and graceful step, to the water's brink, lowered its head, and drank.

When it had satisfied its thirst, it turned, and walking up onto the bank, stopped and gazed around, as if frightened.

In an instant Nattie's rifle was raised, and he was about to end the life of the meek-eyed

so, when Frank Ballard put out his hand and said:

"Hold! Nattie; don't fire!"

"Mortal Moses!" exclaimed Nattie, half provoked at being interrupted, "what ails you?"

"Don't fire upon that deer, Nattie. Don't you see it is a tame one?"

"It is, confound it!" exclaimed the youth, as he discovered the red, glossy neck of the animal *encircled by a narrow blue ribbon!* "Who ever heard of such a thing as that before?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Frank, in a tone of strange excitement, "it tells me one thing, Nattie—that ribbon has been put there by fairy fingers, rest assured. By Jove! let us look around. I must know who the owner of that deer is. That ribbon, there, on that doe's neck, here in the wilds of Michigan, impresses me—"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Nattie, so loud that the deer took fright and bounded away; "I verily believe you have been smitten by the flatter of that ribbon, Frank."

Before Frank could reply, a singular looking character emerged from the bushes, and paused before the astonished young bee-hunters.

CHAPTER V.

A STRANGE WARNING.

It was an Indian that emerged from the bushes and confronted Frank and Nattie—a low-browed and dirty-looking Pottawattomie, whose face wore a malicious smile. He was unarmed, which was sufficient evidence of his friendship; still there was something in his sullen, hangdog countenance that was not calculated to inspire the young men with perfect confidence, at first sight.

"How do?" the red-skin said, as he halted before the bee-hunters.

"Very well, thank you," replied Nattie; "how is your excellency?"

"Come tell white bee-hunters that guide at the village of Pokahgan," answered the Indian.

"Who do you mean by the guide?"

"The big white hunter."

"Do you mean to say that old Goliah Strong is at the Indian village now?"

"Yes; he came there tired and lame—then send Swift Wing after his friends to come—meet one friend and send 'im on—then come on for you—old guide say bringum boat."

The Indian told his story so straight and with such an air of truth that our friends took no trouble to cross-question him, though they took a natural dislike to the fellow the moment they saw him, for his countenance on a white man's face would have been an index to a bad character. However, the bee-hunters at once packed up and embarked in the bateau for the Indian village known as Alleghan.

Nathan and the Indian used the oars, and as they glided out into the river and turned up the stream, Frank Ballard became silent and thoughtful. His mind went back to the deer they had seen, and the ribbon upon its neck. Somehow or other, that very sight, trifling as it was, had impressed young Ballard strangely. He knew not why it was, for it was one of those unaccountable things that conjure up thoughts and feelings in the mind and heart that seem born of intuition.

While revolving the matter in his mind, the report of a rifle on the northern shore startled him from his reverie, and forced a cry of surprise from Nattie's lips. At the same instant, the Indian gave a quick, convulsive jerk at the oars, then his head fell forward upon his breast and he gasped for breath and rattled in the throat.

Nathan let go his oars and lifted the head of the Indian from its cramped position. As he did so, he saw a drop of blood ooze from a tiny hole in the forehead and trail a crimson track across the face.

"My heavens, Frank! this Indian has been murdered!" the youth exclaimed, "right before our very eyes."

"What in the world can it mean?" replied Frank, glancing uneasily around him.

"I know that none of our friends fired the shot, for none of their rifles throw as small bullets as this that has killed the red-skin."

"Ah! by heavens, look there, Nattie!—stand on your guard!" suddenly exclaimed Frank.

"River pirates! or I'm a base lunatic," cried Nattie, dropping his hand to the butt of his revolver.

The object that had so startled them was a strange-looking craft that glided suddenly out from the mouth of a stream emptying into the river, and hitherto kept concealed by the dense, arcing bushes that grew upon either shore. It was a small bark canoe, finished off with all the elaborate skill of Indian handiwork. It was covered with an awning and hung upon all sides with a curtain of thin white canvas that completely concealed the occupant from view. It was provided with oars instead of the customary paddle, and the easy and graceful manner in which they rose and fell evinced great skill in their management.

This strange boat headed directly toward our friends, who, between the dead warrior and the piratical-looking craft, were in no little confusion of mind. Finally Nattie demanded:

"Who or what comes there?"

There was no response, but the stranger continued to advance and soon ran alongside our friends.

With wildly-staring eyes the latter sat motionless, their hands upon their revolvers, waiting for the curtain to be drawn aside, or for some demonstration, at least, on the part of the unknown. But to their surprise he remained under cover of his floating sedan, silent and motionless. Through the thin white curtains they could see, *en silhouette*, the dark outlines of a slight figure, and what struck them as most remarkable was its resembling the form of a woman.

Nattie was tempted to reach out and draw aside the curtain, but before he could muster up courage to do so, a small white hand and arm were thrust from between the selvages of the curtains. In that hand, which left no doubt as to the sex of its owner, was held a slip of white paper which Frank received.

"Read it," came a soft, subdued voice from the interior of the sedan boat.

Frank started at the sound of her voice, and with a low cry thrust out his hand to sweep aside the curtains; but the boat had glided beyond his reach, and in a few moments later was lost to view among the drooping foliage.

Frank now glanced at the paper in his hand. Upon it was written in pencil these words:

"Stranger, be careful. Pokahgan, the Pottawattomie chief, is the white man's friend, but not so with all his men. Some would murder you for a dollar. The one with you is a deceitful traitor, luring you into danger. Retrace your steps, and, I repeat it, be careful."

THE UNKNOWN MARKSMAN."

Frank read the note with a shudder, but without a word he passed it to Nattie to read.

Both were completely astonished—not so much by the warning as by the name signed to it.

"Who is the Unknown Marksman?" asked Nattie.

"I don't know; I never heard of him before. He must have slain this Indian," replied Frank, in a strange tone.

"That was a woman in that boat, Frank."

"I know it, Nattie, and would give five years of my life to see her. When she spoke, her voice seemed to echo through the very fibers of my heart."

"I dare say her fingers put that ribbon around that doe's neck; but, Frank, you are excited."

"I know it, but never mind, Nattie. Do you think she is the Unknown Marksman?"

"Of course not; this is written in a bold, manly hand; but, Frank, I am afraid Goliah and Ed are in trouble. That Indian seemed to have understood all about our big guide and companion, and if he meant to lure us into danger, two to one our guide and Ed have met with danger."

"Well, what are we to do?" questioned Frank.

"Toss this dead Ananias overboard and return to where the boys left us, and wait for them until we are satisfied they are not coming; then we can decide on our future course."

So saying, they consigned the body of the Indian to a watery grave, then tacked about and returned to the place where they were halted when their two friends left them.

The bee-hunters now guarded their situation with extreme caution, for they were in a country of which they knew little, and of whose people they knew less. Hitherto their labors had been confined to Kalamazoo, and what they had learned of the Indians' character was among the friendly tribes on the head-waters of that stream. They had learned that although the red-men were peaceable and friendly, many of them were given to petty thieving and crimes, and would not hesitate to stab a man in the dark.

Nattie saw that his companion was deeply impressed by the events of the last half-hour; and while they were discussing their future movements, Ed Mathews, to their great relief, returned. But he brought no word of their guide, Goliah Strong.

Frank Ballard narrated what had transpired since he left them, and showed him the warning of the Unknown Marksman.

Mathews was already excited when he arrived at camp; this his comrades saw and attributed to some adventure while absent; but when he had read the paper he said:

"I believe it—that the Indians are bent upon mischief, for I crossed a fresh trail out here leading south-east, and shortly afterward I saw an Indian with a gun skulking from tree to tree as if shadowing something or some one. If old Goliah is not already in trouble, I am afraid that party will find him. Boys, I think it would be prudent for us to drop down the river into a milder climate. What say you, boys?"

"Anything for bees-wax and safety," responded young Darrall.

"I am sure I have no desire to remain here and encounter that Unknown Marksman if he serves all as he did our red Ananias," replied Frank.

"No. You'd rather encounter his daughter—she of the covered boat, white hand and arm,

and soft, witching voice," replied Nattie, with a mischievous sparkle of the eye. "Frank is bound to fall in love with something yet before he dies, and when he does center that heart of twenty-eight years growth upon a woman, it'll be there like unto one of the permanent fixtures of the universe."

Alas! Nattie knew little of Frank Ballard's heart, else he would not have spoken so lightly of it. He had little idea of the secret that lay buried in its inmost recesses; and as he spoke, Frank turned toward the river to conceal his emotions, and said:

"Ah, Nattie, you are a wild boy, and I pray that your young heart may never grow heavy with the wrongs of a wicked world as—but this is no time for moralizing, so let us embark at once."

Entering the boat they pushed out from shore and dropped silently down the river.

Night was approaching, and before they had journeyed far they began discussing the subject of a night encampment. It was finally agreed that they return to their previous night's camp before halting. This was some three miles further down. An island was the point in question; there they had *cached* a large amount of honey until they should return down the river. It was an admirable place for defensive operations, and a point where their absent guide would be as likely to find them as any other should he escape all dangers.

Night came on long before they reached their destination; but the moon sailed aloft into the azure depths of night and flooded the river and forest with a mellow glow.

They pulled on and finally reached the island—a little sand-bar covered with drift, and fringed around with a dense growth of short water-willows. Nattie was the first to leap ashore, and almost the first thing that arrested his attention was a number of huge tracks in the sand where the willows had been trampled down.

But they were not human tracks—they were the tracks of bears. Some were large and some small; and when they saw their honey *cache* had been torn open and ravaged of many a day's hard labor, they knew what had attracted the rapacious honey thieves to the island.

"Well, this is vexation itself," Nattie exclaimed, as he regarded the gutted *cache* with sore regret.

"We'd ought to have been more careful in covering the pit," said Ballard.

"Immaculate Moses! more careful? who ever supposed that a family of hungry bears was waiting and watching—"

"Hark!" interrupted Ed Mathews.

A movement in the willows arrested their attention, and the next moment they saw a young bear walk out of the willows and approach their canoe which had been partly beached on the upper side of the island. Stopping near the prow of the craft the animal sniffed around it, then deliberately climbed into the boat and began an exploration for the bee-hunters' honey-cups.

"The infernal, impudent brute," muttered Nattie; "I'll stop that," and he raised his gun to fire. But at this juncture another bear—a male of huge proportions—issued from the bushes and approached the boat. Reaching the prow, the animal reared up, and placing its fore paws on the end of the craft, was about to leap in, when the bateau gave way before its ponderous weight and shot out into the river, and was carried away by the current.

The big bear sat down upon his haunches, sniffed the air and looked longingly after the boat that was floating away with its companion that seemed, in noways, disconcerted by its sudden departure; but rather pleased over the idea of having the bee-hunters' supplies all to itself.

"I'll settle with that old cuss, confound him!" exclaimed Nattie, and raising his rifle he fired at the big bear. But, under the excitement of the moment, his aim had been unsteady; the bear was only wounded in the shoulder; and with a fierce growl, it charged upon the authors of its pain.

"Run, boys, run!" cried Nattie, taking to his heels.

Ed and Frank discharged their guns at the animal, though without any other effect than to increase its pain and fury, then turned and fled after the light-heeled Nattie across the island.

At this juncture, three more bears, a female and two cubs, emerged from the bushes and joined in the pursuit, for the scent of their companion's blood had aroused them.

As if cognizant of the fact that Nattie was the author of his suffering, the wounded bear seemed to single him out for his first victim. Seeing this, Ed and Frank ran in a different direction, and taking advantage of this diversion, they hastily reloaded their rifles and opened fire on the animals. They succeeded in killing the female and her cubs, but the male seemed to bear a charmed life, and the more shots he received the greater became his speed and anger. He was now crowding close upon Nattie's heels. The willows were no more impediment to his advance than as much grass would have been, and this enabled him to gain upon the boy. In

The Giant Rifleman.

and out of the moonlight and bushes the two glided, Nattie exerting every effort to elude the beast, while the latter, with glaring eyes, open mouth, and blood-dripping sides, shuffled on close behind.

Whenever the bear came in sight Ed and Frank, from their coverts fired upon it. The last time it appeared, however, it was not ten feet from Nattie; and as the youth again disappeared in the bushes they felt that the last hope was gone.

A moment later they heard a cry and a double splash in the water.

"My God, Ed! it has forced him in the river!" cried Frank.

They bounded from the bushes and hurried across the island to the water's edge. They saw the bear struggling in the waves, but Nattie was nowhere to be seen.

"The bear has borne him down under the waves!" cried Ed, in an agony of suspense.

A rustling in the bushes to their right arrested their attention, and the next instant they saw the lithe, graceful figure of an animal launch out into the stream and swim toward the bear. It was immediately followed by another and still another, until six of them had left the island and attacked the bear.

A fearful and deadly struggle now ensued in the river between bruin and the other animals. Our two friends watched the conflict with great eagerness, expecting to see Nattie's form rise to the surface; but in this they were disappointed. He was nowhere to be seen, and they were about to call to him when the form of a man pushed through the willows to the right and approached them, holding his sides and laughing till his whole frame shook as with an ague chill.

This strange being was dressed in a suit of buck-skin made in the regular border style. On his head he wore a cap made of the fur of the wolverine, the head of the animal being arranged in front and in such a manner that the nose answered for a peak to the cap, while the ears were pricked up as if still possessed of life and cowardly fear.

"Great gora'mighty, friends! isn't that one o' the most dee-lightful, friskiest concentration of physical powers ye ever clapped yer optics on?" demanded the stranger, in a rollicking tone, between fits of hearty laughter. "Why, just dis-kiver that old b'ar—ha! ha! ha!—spin round and round like a big turbine water-wheel; and see those boys o' mine how they sail in on their muscle. Ha! ha! ha! gents, that's one o' the most dee-licious, superb ramifications that Old Wolverine ever had the pleasure o' gittin' up. Yoop! sail in, boys!"

"Indeed! are you Old Wolverine, the Wolf-Hunter?" asked Frank Ballard.

"I be, sir, that very ole daisy, and it strikes me in the region of the cerebellum that we meandered hereaways just about the appointed time to save your friend."

"But we are not sure he is safe," answered Mathews.

"Safe as a dollar in a Jew's pocket; he dodged the b'ar arter he jumped into the water and swum around the island."

A moment later, Nattie, soaked to the skin, made his appearance.

A shout of joy burst from the lips of his friends.

"I say, youngster," said Old Wolverine, as familiarly as though he had always known the bee-hunters, "you made some purty lively motions, now didn't ye?"

"Well, stranger," said Nattie, "I rather imagine I did, and I think I had reasons for my actions, too; but are those your dogs that tackled that bear?"

"They are for a factorum," answered Old Wolverine, "and now, don't you forget it, that b'ar 'll git his solar system eclipsed from center to conference. Them 're dogs knows as well as a surgeon whar to feel for a tender spot. I've larnt 'em, ye see. They know just whar to close on a b'ar, deer or wolverine. Why I've act'y see'd old Baltic, that's my bulldog, as what is a reg'ler snorter, snap a catamount in two so slick and easy that each eend went flyin' in opposite directions—oh, a hundred yards or more apart. Now, that's a fact. Yoop! hurrah thar, boys! Wool him, Baltic! bleed him, Fleetfoot! stab him, Mellow Tongue!" and the old hunter clapped his hands and shouted at his dogs until the very night resounded with the reverberation of his powerful lungs.

The fight between the dogs and bear continued in the water. The latter acted upon the defensive altogether, and was at last compelled, through sheer loss of blood and exhaustion, to yield, to overwhelming numbers, the life he had clung to so tenaciously.

Old Wolverine now called his dogs ashore, and advancing to the center of the island where the moonlight fell unobstructed, calmly seated himself upon the carcass of one of the bears slain by Ed and Frank. Then, one by one, he called his six dogs to him and looked them carefully over for wounds; and when assured that they had received no serious injury, he said:

"These 're dorgs I call the Old Guard, 'ca'se as what they are infalible. These two"—referring to two tall, slender grayhounds—"I call Mellow Tongue and Fleetfoot. The one has a voice

as charming as a flute, and soft and musical as Moorish widders'; and t'other'n can run so fast that the heat created by friction 'g'inst the air 'll singe his hair—look thar if you don't b'lieve it! Then, here comes ole Patsy and Liner—two as good fox-hounds as ever led a trail or swaller'd a loaf of corn-pone. And thar, then, is Cubic, as sagacious a mongrel as ever throttled a wolverine or nipped the heels of a stag; and, lastly, thar is the reserved force of the Old Guard, Baltic. You see his nationality in his countenance—a bull-dog. He'd tip the beam at two hundred avoirdupois. Jist look at 'em chops, boys; why, they hang like saddle-skirts over jaws that's stronger than an iron vise. I tell ye that dorg, Baltic, is one chunk of muscle from the eend of his nose to the tip o' his tail, even if the tail isn't but three inches long. Ha! hal! me and my loves, boys, have had hundreds of grand ole frolics together in these 're woods. We like it—we've been raised in these woods, ye might say; and, don't you forgit that we've been a sort of epidemic among the wolverines, on which the State pays a very nice little bounty."

"How came you over on this island?" asked Nattie.

"Why, we heard you a-firin' and supposed a fight was goin' atwixt some raftsmen, and so we came over to inquire into it. We war comin' up the river in a boat, and when we see'd it wasn't raftsmen fightin', we couldn't tell what war up until we got right up here; then we see'd that boy reel off into the river and the b'ar arter him, and knewed what the racket meant. So I spoke to the Old Guard, and away went the dogs of war."

As the rollicking and whimsical old wolf-hunter concluded his speech he carelessly threw his arm around Baltic's neck and began humming to himself:

"Over the hills and far away,
Over the hills and far away.
Over the hi-ls and far a-way, etc."

His voice was not unmusical. There was a plaintive melody in its strains that at once appealed to the inner soul of his audience.

When he had ended his song and apparent musings, Ed said:

"Wolverine, did you see our boat going down the river, with a bear in it?"

"I saw a boat jist below here, but I didn't notice a b'ar in it—in fact, I jist glanced at it, and as I seen no person in it, I paid no furder attention to it. How come a b'ar in your boat?"

Ed told him how the cub went adrift—eliciting a roar of laughter from Old Wolverine.

Having reposed perfect confidence in the hunter from the first, Frank now went on and narrated their adventure of the day; and asked the old borderman's opinion of the same.

"Wal," he began, "it's a leetle mixed in my mind as to real facts. I've hearn that the Ingins war gittin' as fidgety as a hypocrite on the mourner's bench, but I don't b'lieve they'd dare come out openly ag'inst the whites. Old Pokah-gan is too smart a chief not to see the result of such an escapade. But tell you whar I think the trouble is: this country is full of lumbermen, bark-peelers and shingle-weavers; and among the many hundreds of them there are haydoogins of mean, ornery critters who come out here to escape justice and pertend to work. Thar's Bertraw's camp made up of Canadians; some of 'em—in fact, most of 'em—are good men; but there are some meaner than the proprietor o' the sulphur-pit hisself. Same way with Spencer's men—ditto the settlers and Indians. As sinful souls love the night, these fellows are drawn together by a natural affinity, and together they concoct and do a great deal of mean things. Howsumever, the Unknown Marksman's proving an epidemic to some o' that class o' pilgrims."

"Who is the Unknown Marksman? and what's your opinion of him, Wolverine?" asked Ballard.

"I think he's a rattlin' good shot—sure of his game every pop, as old Mellow Tongue is of his trail. That's all I know 'bout him, and, in fact, is all I want to know."

"Which way are you traveling now?" asked Nattie.

"Goin' up the river on a big deer-hunt; that's rattlin' fine sport, boys. Jist let me strike a trail and then give Mellow Tongue the lead, and oh, land of the blessed! Sich ravishin' music! Why, it would drive you into ecstasies—yea, you'd expire with delight to hear the Old Guard sing as they string out through the woods. With Mellow Tongue in the lead and old Baltic 'bout a half-mile behind, that trail becomes a gamut of music. Didn't you ever hear a pack like that on the trail of a festive fox?—you didn't?—well, then, you've still sumthin' to live for. I'm goin' up the river now, and if you fellers want to take passage with me, and wouldn't care to spell me now and then at the oars, why, come along, my Josies, and we'll have some rare old sport. Oh, I tell ye, I'm none o' yer sedates—I'm as frisky as a festive mule, and can stand more fun and frolic than any youngster in Michigan."

"But we were going down the river," said Frank; "besides we are bee-hunters."

"Bee-hunters?—well, now, don't you forgit it,

gents, that I can take you right slap-dab whar the bees are thicker than grains of sand on the desert Salbarah, or cranberries in the Blue Marsh. Why, it's a fact, they're so plenty, more or less, that they can't find holler trees enough to put their honey in; and so they just stick it right in among the branches. Why, the trees up thar are all glaum'd over with honey. Bears just have rollicking times up thar."

And, notwithstanding his wonderful exaggerations, the bee-hunters took passage with the old hunter and started back up the river, still in hopes that they would find Goliah Strong, their guide.

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERY OF SPIRIT RAPIDS.

As the four men journeyed slowly up the river, they discussed the absence of Goliah Strong and the appearance of the strange woman in the covered boat, as well as the death of the Indian, Swift-wing.

"I shouldn't wonder," said Old Wolverine, "but what that Unknown Marksman was quartered up that way. If so, I wouldn't be afeard to call on him."

"Perhaps you might get a bullet through your brain," Nattie suggested.

"I hope not; but if anything of the kind should happen, boys, don't let the Old Guard come to grief. Ole Mellow Tongue's olfactory are so keen that you could soon train him to track a bee through the air like a flirt. But then, I don't want to go yit—I'm not ready to die," and as he concluded he began softly whistling:

"Over the hills and far away,"

at the same time keeping time with the measured strokes of the oars.

Mentally, each of the bee-hunters pronounced Old Wolverine a genial old fellow, full of rollicking sport and whimsical expression not altogether devoid of some philosophy; and he congratulated himself upon their having fallen into his companionship.

A few hours' rowing brought them back to the mouth of the Sout' Black river, Castle Island and Spirit Rapids.

Castle Island was a rocky promontory shaped like a wedge, and splitting the waters of the South Black before it emptied into the main river. The waters that passed to the right of the island flowed in a strong current down through a narrow channel almost under the high rocky walls of the island, while the main volume of water that passed to the left of the island, broke into wild, tossing rapids. The island was covered with a dense growth of scrubby pines, and was inaccessible. The right side and the end overlooking the Black river proper, was guarded by high, projecting walls; while on the left side the rapids made it impossible for any human being to cross to the island. At least it seemed so to a casual observer watching the sweeping, tossing, twisting waters.

The moon was in the zenith when our friends reached this point. Castle Island, as some imaginative genius had named it, stood out against the northern sky like some old castellated ruins, true enough; while a white mist hung over Spirit Rapids, in which the same genius must have imagined he could see spiritual forms hovering over the seething waters.

"I'd give all my right, title and interest in purgatory to git into Castle Island," remarked Old Wolverine, as they stood out before the imposing island.

"It seems to be unapproachable," said Nattie. "Perpendicular walls fifty feet high on one side and end, and these guarded by water, and the other side guarded by the rapids. And yet, I believe it is inhabited."

"Impossible!" replied young Mathews; "no one could scale those crumbly walls; while to cross the rapids would be entirely out of the question."

"Wal, boys, I'm goin' to see just how fur into the rapids we can git, jist for fun. This boat is stout as a man-o'-war," said Old Wolverine, and without consulting his companions' feelings on the subject, he deliberately turned the craft out of the main river into the mouth of the south branch, and started toward the rapids. They soon approached so close that they could feel the falling spray upon their hands and faces, and the boat rock under the agitated waters.

"I should think we were about close enough to the rapids, friend Wolverine," declared Frank, "inasmuch as we can gain nothing by going any further."

"I jist want to try you fellers' nerves," said the old man; "if we could git five rods furder up, we could make the island like a top by sidling off-head against the current. So don't git skeery, boys."

Frank again entered a protest against what seemed a useless and reckless adventure, but the old hunter, determined to reach the island if possible, pulled with all his power against the rapids.

They had gone probably two rods further when Mellow Tongue suddenly thrust his nose into the air and gave a low, uneasy whine.

"Hear that, Wolverine?" asked Nattie; "your dog knows we're running into danger."

"By the great Pyramids!" exclaimed Old Wolverine; "it is not that—look that! Talk 'bout that bein' no such things as spirits and I'll drink this river dry!"

The old man pointed toward the shore and a little in advance of them, and looking in the direction thus indicated, the bee-hunters were rendered speechless by the sight of a form moving across the rapids—still closer to danger than they were. It was a form wearing a long, grayish-looking gown and a white hood completely covering head and form. Both arms were extended, and the white sleeves of the garment gave them the appearance of vampire wings.

The hunters were impressed with a strange, mysterious fear bordering on superstition, for they looked upon what seemed a supernatural being. Old Wolverine bade his dogs be silent, while with distended eyes he watched the apparition. It was moving across the river toward the island; and it was walking, or rather floating across the current of the rapids—the skirts of its cloak trailing and twisting about its feet on the surface of the eddying waters.

Slowly it passed before them—drifted on through the mist and sweeping tide, and finally disappeared in the shadows of the island.

Old Wolverine drew a breath of relief; the bee-hunters rallied from their awesome stupor.

"Darn my riggin'!" burst from the lips of the hunter.

"What does that mean? I don't understand it," said Nattie Darrall.

"It beats the miracle on old Galilee; if my eyes didn't deceive me, I think I see'd a human critter walk deliberately and fearlessly across the river on the water."

"We all saw it," affirmed Frank, in an earnest tone.

"Then, by gee-hokey, it *was* a spirit!" declared Old Wolverine. "Nothin' else could walk the water like that—ay, these are Spirit Rapids, boys!"

"It's all bosh!" protested the brave Nattie Darrall; "I believe there is a stone foot-bridge along there."

"Oh, the improbabilities of youth!" cried the hunter; "a foot-bridge could be thrown across the Styx as easy as 'em rapids. I tell you—but doleful sound! that goes another!"

True enough; a second figure clad in misty gray, with extended arms, was seen to be moving across the river on the surface of the water. It could not be seen so distinctly as the first, however; the hunters, in their excitement, had permitted the current to carry their boat back some distance from the rapids.

They watched the shadowy form, however, until it had disappeared; then Old Wolverine drew a long breath and exclaimed:

"Boys, this is more pressure on my nervous system than I like. I can stand the hug of a bear, the kick of a hornet, or the nightmare; but I'll be burned if I want to be skeered to death by royal, ginuwine spooks. I tell ye these rapids are ha'nted by the spirits of those dashed to pieces among the rocks. I alers heard it said—"

"I don't believe it," interrupted the boy hero, Nattie Darrall; "I believe there is something material in what we have seen, and am in favor of investigating the matter. I am now satisfied that we can venture up to where the apparitions crossed. I'm not afraid to go where any other person can."

"Well, blest if Wolverine and the Old Guard can't go where any boy can," declared the old Lunter; "and so here goes, spirit or no spirit."

The old hunter plied his oars with all his strength and skill, and by a determined effort succeeded in stemming the writhing current to about the point where the apparitions crossed; but, to their surprise, they found no foot-bridge there—nothing but angry, foaming water upon which their boat rocked and tossed like an egg-shell.

For a minute the whole party was completely dumbfounded. Despite their better education, the bee-hunters now found themselves undergoing that vague, superstitious fear born of doubt and uncertainty, in consequence of what they had witnessed—a sight which they could not account for, and, therefore, involving a necessity for the supernatural. And with this feeling stealing over them, the roar of the rapids seemed blended with ghostly voices, and the leaping waters imbued with a ghostly spirit.

At length Nattie said:

"If I see another of those apparitions, I shall reach for it;" and cocking his gun, he laid it across his lap, ready for instant use.

"They say lead will not hurt a ghost or witch—that nothing but a silver bullet will touch them," observed Old Wolverine, trying to appear calm; "but if the Old Guard only had good footing. I'll bet they'd snake in yer ghostship in a jiffy. Why, boys, ole Mellow Tongue could track a whale across the ocean; and with him in the lead and Baltic in rear, I tell ye the brine'd fly from thar heels. Wolverine-huntin's gittin' to be dull. 'ca'se, when Mellow Tongue sounds the keynote, the wolf just stops and arranges its throat for Baltic's teeth and—dies."

And then—boy, do you see that?—thar goes another o' them critters—that's a little one—must be a young ghost."

A third apparition had appeared from the shore and was moving across the river toward the island. Like the others, it was clad in a hood and cloak of spectral gray; yet it appeared to be considerably smaller than those that had preceded it.

By this time the boat had again drifted away from the line traversed by the unknown; and, although the form could be but dimly seen through the mist, Nattie resolved to fire upon it.

With a strange uncertainty and misgiving, he raised his gun, and, taking careful aim, fired. The report of the piece sounded dead and sullen, and it had scarcely jarred upon the ears of the little party ere a heartrending and piercing scream rent the night, and the apparition was seen to sink upon the bosom of the water.

"My God!" cried Nattie, "that was a human cry—the cry of a woman! Pull, Wolverine, pull to the rescue, though I be a murderer!"

The hunter bent to the oars and sent the sharp-prowed boat speeding against the current. Into the very edge of the rapids he pulled.

Frank Ballard is in the prow and with distended eyes he searches for the body of the youth's victim. He sees an object rise to the surface on the left. He sees a pair of arms buffeting the waves.

"To the left, Wolverine, to the left!" he shouts.

They turned the boat to the left. It shot like a dart alongside the body. Frank made a grab at it and seized a human form by the wrist; but at this instant the boat struck a hidden rock and capsized. All were thrown headlong into the water, and the next moment were ruthlessly swept away on the bosom of the river.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CAMP OF THE SHINGLE-WEAVERS.

THE ring of many axes, the crash and roar of falling trees, the raps of "cross-cut" saws, the crack of heavy ox-whips, and the shouts of ox-drivers resounded through the forest of the Black river of Michigan. Busy as bees worked the little army of lumbermen—some of them stripped to the waist, their great muscular arms and breasts rising and falling with the swing of their axes—others with their heads bared and their bronzed, bearded faces sweltering with the summer heat.

One by one the great forest monarchs went down, and little by little the sunlight was let in upon the damp, mossy ground, where, for centuries, perhaps, dismal shadows had lurked.

A mile from where this work was going on, were the homes of the laborers—lumbermen as they were called. The place was known as Camp Spencer—named in honor of Captain Randolph Spencer, who owned a share in the vast tract of timber-lands surrounding the place, and who personally superintended the work of both "logging" and "rafting." A score of log cabins, a few outhouses, sheds and stables made up Camp Spencer. Some of the men had brought their families with them into the great woods and were at home there. The place was provided with a post-office—a great convenience to those whose homes and whose families were far away; once a week they had a mail, and were thereby kept posted as to the outside world and affairs at home.

Captain Spencer employed a force of seventy-five men. The most of these were engaged as choppers, and the rest as raftsmen and "log-drivers." The duty of the last-named was rather precarious and difficult. It sometimes became necessary to float logs a number of miles down the river before they were formed into a raft. This was either owing to shallow water or recently-formed sand-bars that would not admit the passage of a large raft. So a large number of logs were rolled into the river, when a "driver" with a long pole would straddle one in the center, then, by means of his pole, keep as many logs as he could reach in the current; and in this manner float them down-stream. Any one who has attempted the feat of riding a log in the water can conceive the difficulty of "log-driving."

A few of Spencer's men were detailed as foragers, and one or two good shots as hunters. The former with teams were sent out to the distant settlements for general supplies, while the latter procured such game as abounded in the Michigan woods.

Deer, turkey, squirrel and bear, with the choicest of black and speckled bass and pickerel from Saddle and White lakes were some of the substantial food of the hardy Michigan lumbermen; to which was added a dessert from the great cranberry and whortleberry marshes, and the choicest maple sugar from the Grand Traverse camps.

Captain Spencer was himself a great hunter. He labored but little unless it was upon the chase, where *any* lazy man will exert himself apparently, beyond human endurance. He was a man somewhat after the style of an English sporting-man, whose sole delight was in a fine

rifle, a pack of blooded hounds, and fast horses. All three of these the captain possessed. His hounds were some of the finest-blooded animals in the country, and numbered ten. Four of these were stag-hounds, four English gray-hounds and two imported Cuban bloodhounds.

The captain usually spent his afternoons in the woods with gun and dogs; and as he set out one day on his usual hunt—nearly a year after his adventures on a raft as recorded in a previous chapter—all noticed that he was arrayed in his best hunting attire; and that there was a smile upon his face—a lightness in his step.

His hounds, coupled in pairs, trailed along at his heels.

In fact, the man's face did wear a look differing greatly from that worn that memorable night on the raft. He had shaved his great beard off. Only a heavy mustache of all that hirsute worn a year before, now remained upon his face. And the change was for the better, for the captain looked several years younger and more prepossessing, though a livid scar, running down across the cheek and throat, somewhat marred the regularity of his features.

After leaving his office at the camp, he sauntered leisurely across the clearing between the buildings and the main woods, stopping occasionally to speak to some choppers, or give some direction to a gang "boss" who did not fail to notice the exuberance of his spirits. Abe Bran-non, who noticed the smile upon his face, thought he had finally outgrown the terrors that had been stamped upon his very soul and face a year previous when Josh Myers lay dead in the tent on the raft. He thought the captain had forgotten all about that night, and inwardly longed to remind him of the fact.

Passing his workmen, Spencer went on into the deep woods where the vandalism of man had not extended—where the shadows were deep almost as twilight. He seemed familiar with his course; though he followed no trail or path. Nor did he expect to find game so close to the ranch, for, instead of observing the precaution of a hunter, he went whistling to himself as though in deep thought.

He had journeyed some four or five miles when a sound, like that made by the blow of a wooden mallet upon iron, fell upon his ears. It came down from the hollow in advance of him; but he seemed to know what it meant, for he moved on toward the point from whence it emanated, and soon came in sight of a low hut, near which three men were at work. One of these men, with a froe and mallet, was riving shingles from blocks of wood that had been previously sawn into proper lengths. It was the blow of his mallet upon the iron froe that the captain had heard. The other two men with sharp drawing-knives were seated at "shaving-horses," shaving down the rough sides and ragged edges of the shingles and preparing them for market.

The camp of these "Shingle-Weavers," as this class of men are known in the parlance of the lumber regions, was situated in a dark and dismal valley under some old oak monarchs where it seemed that none but dejected spirits could live. But these camps were usually located in the midst of the finest timber, for only the very best trees were used in making shaved shingles.

The appearance of the three "weavers" was rather remarkable for men of that class. They were all of slight forms, fair complexion and intellectual appearance. By the size and color of their hands, one would not suppose they were laboring men; yet the great pile of shingles around them bore witness to their unceasing labor and industry.

"Good afternoon, my jolly weavers," exclaimed Spencer, running onto them before they were aware of his presence.

"Hullo! howdy, captain?" they exclaimed, laying down their tools and removing the handkerchiefs that were tied round their heads.

"Hard at work are you, boys, toiling your lives away down here in Hades!"

"Ay, captain," responded the river, "we were born under an unlucky star."

"Well, boys, as long as you like this seclusion, I am sure I can stand it," replied the lumberman. "But, then I presume you'll not always follow the life of Shingle-Weavers."

"We hope not," replied the river, with a smile.

"Has Duncan got around yet?" asked one of the shavers.

"Yes, he came in this morning. He has been to Chicago, Cincinnati and St. Louis, and not only disposed of every shingle we had on hand, but he brings an order for several thousand more."

"Ah!" exclaimed the river, his little black eyes sparkling like beads of fire, "that last stock we made was the best we ever put on the market."

"They were genuine, Vandi," replied Spencer, "but now we want a new style. We've had lap-shingles, now give us a few thousand joint-shingles."

As he concluded, Spencer passed Vandi a ten-dollar bank-note of the Merchants' and Mechanics' Bank of D—n. Vandi uttered a low whistle as he glanced over the bill. His two com-

The Giant Rifleman.

panions advanced and looked over his shoulders, their eyes burning with curiosity.

"That's a charmer, captain," in a business way.

"I think so, myself."

"What's the circulation?"

"Duncan says about half a million—principally in the West."

"A big thing, a big thing," mused Vandi; "but then I call the engraving on the bill but a second-rate job. Just look, for instance, at the ungraceful position of that goddess; and the clumsy arrangement of that vignette. Pooh! it's miserable for half a million circulation. I'll swear I believe it is counterfeit."

His companions smiled.

"Duncan says it is genuine," said the captain.

"He knows, he knows!" exclaimed Vandi; "but as to the texture of this paper—"

"Never mind that; Duncan will attend to that."

"Very well," said Vandi, with a sigh, glancing over the pile of blocks before them; "I think we can get this timber worked up in about two weeks."

"Very well," said Spencer, shouldering his gun; "I'll call again in a few days. I am in quite a hurry now."

So saying, the captain left the "Shingle-Weavers'" camp, leaving the ten-dollar bill in Vandi's hands, and a strange suspicion resting over the object of his visit and the hidden meaning of their conversation.

CHAPTER VII.

IDA ZANE.

CAPTAIN SPENCER did not retrace his steps homeward after leaving the Shingle-Weavers' camp, but struck across the hills toward the north. An hour's walk brought him to a great marsh over a mile square. It was known therabouts as the Blue Marsh; and was covered with cranberry and whortleberry-lushes. From there alone went many bushes of these berries of commerce.

In the center of the marsh was a little wooded knoll rising several feet above the surface of the surrounding lowlands, and upon the summit of this stood a little vine-embowered cabin. It was the home of one Daniel Berry, who, for a trifling, had purchased the marsh and for years devoted his sole attention to its unfailing crops of berries. Old Cranberry, as he was more popularly known, did not live there alone in his isolated home. His widowed daughter and her child, a lovely girl of seventeen, resided with him, and aided him in his labors in the marsh. But the three lived almost a secluded life, for it was very seldom that any one ever crossed their threshold. At certain times in the year teams came up from South Haven after berries which the old man would have ready for market, but none of the purchasers ever entered his house. In fact, they were never invited over to the cabin, but remained in camp on the edge of the marsh until they had received their loads. His daughter was never seen away from the cabin, but his grand-daughter, the pretty, rosy-cheeked, bright-eyed Ida Zane, was most always at his side; and few strangers ever saw her but what they were ready, the next minute, to worship at the shrine of her wondrous beauty.

Among Ida Zane's admirers was Captain Randolph Spencer. He loved her—yea, he adored her from the moment they first met. At least, he always told her so, and she never had reason to believe otherwise. On the other hand, the captain felt satisfied that his love was reciprocated, although she had always coquettishly evaded a confession in words. He had met her often, though under circumstances that would never permit of but few minutes' conversation in private; for her grandfather was always at her side, or in sight, when away from the cabin. He had never been to the home of Daniel Berry, and although he had often courted an invitation, it never came, either from the lips of the old man or Ida. He did not attribute this, however, to a want of courtesy or civility, for they had always treated him kindly; but thought that, perhaps, it was owing to the extreme poverty of their home and their sensitive natures. He knew by the old man's appearance, and Ida's also, that they had once seen better days.

But the captain had made up his mind to visit the cabin without an invitation; and it was with this intention that he had left home, and that we now find him on the edge of the Blue Marsh.

One reason, perhaps, why many had never been to the Berry cabin, was owing to the fact that it could only be reached in the summer by water. The knoll upon which it stood was surrounded on three sides by a deep swamp, and on the fourth by a wide, deep creek—tributary to the Middle Black river. This stream cut the marsh in two. During the winter it, as well as the swamp, was frozen over; and it was then that the berries growing in the latter were gathered.

The captain knew where a canoe was tied up on the bank of the creek some distance below the cabin, and securing this, he at once embarked for the home of the berry-pickers, de-

termined to end the suspense that had so long been hanging over his peace of mind and heart; though he experienced some doubt as to the manner of his reception.

He left his gun and dogs ashore, knowing full well that the trained animals would remain there until he returned.

Being unskilled in the use of the paddle, the captain made slow progress up the sluggish stream; and he had scarcely made half the distance when he espied a canoe with a single occupant coming down the stream. A glance told him that the occupant was Ida Zane, whom he sought.

A look, half disappointment and half delight, swept over the face of the captain.

In a few minutes their canoes were alongside each other, resting quietly upon the bosom of the water.

"Why, Mr. Spencer!" exclaimed the vivacious little Ida, her blue eyes gleaming with joy, and her pretty face all radiant with smiles of innocence and childish pleasure; "where are you going?"

"My little sprite, I was on my way to see you," Spencer replied, and leaning forward and taking her hand in his, pressed it to his lips. She did not resent this liberty. Young and unsophisticated as she was, she knew not that the man was trying to throw an influence around her soul that she could not resist.

"I saw you coming," she said, "and thinking it was grandpapa, I started to meet him."

"Then you are disappointed?"

"Oh, no, sir; I am very glad to meet you, Mr. Spencer, and know that you are safe. Grandpa tells me that that terrible creature called the Unknown Marksman has killed two or three of your men lately."

"Then you do care for me, Ida?" he said.

"Why, to be sure; I like all my friends," said the kind-hearted little creature.

"Can you not say you love me, Ida—love me as I adore you?"

"What is love, Mr. Spencer?" she replied, in a tone that seemed to Spencer a coquettish evasion; "is it not the regards we have for all our friends?"

"No, it is an affection of the heart—an affection that binds two souls together with a fond devotion that only death can sever. Love differs with friendship, Ida, as the heat of a furnace differs with the warmth of the sun. You have won my heart; I am miserable out of your sight; and I have sought this interview to ask you to be my wife. Oh, I pray you will not say no."

"Why, you surprise me, Mr. Spencer," the maiden replied. "I never supposed you would want to marry me—a silly girl. In fact, I never thought about marrying anybody."

"Did you never think that your grandfather and your mother are growing old, and that some day you will need a home of your own?"

"Why, I always think that the older they grow the closer I ought to stay by them," he answered, in a tone that to the captain seemed slightly tinged with sarcasm.

"Be my wife, Ida," he finally said, bursting forth in a passionate fervor, "and your mother and grandfather shall never want. I am rich, Ida, and you shall live like a lady, and not while away your sweet young life in the Blue Marsh picking berries."

"I have been very happy here, I am sure. I like to pick berries," she said, with provoking indifference.

"But as my wife, Ida, you shall still be happy."

"Do you think I can be happier than I am?" she asked, a little thoughtfully.

"There is no limit to joy, Ida, and I assure you of a life of perpetual happiness if you will consent to be my wife."

"Mr. Spencer," she answered glancing down the stream, "I cannot answer you now, for there comes grandfather. I will take time to think the matter over."

Spencer's brow darkened with a look of disappointment, and turning his eyes toward the approaching boat, thought to himself:

"Perdition take him! I wish he was in the bottom of Lake Michigan."

Ida might have read the man's thoughts in his face had she not sent her little bark canoe gliding away to meet her old friend. But in a few minutes she returned, and the three boats stopped side and side.

Spencer greeted the old man kindly, though in his heart he cursed him.

"I knew you were about, captain," said the berry-picker, "for I saw your gun and dogs down the creek."

"Yes; I went out hunting, and happening down this way, I concluded to run up to your cabin and engage a few bushels of whortleberries for the use of the camp; but on the way I met Ida, and—"

"I reckon we can furnish you the berries, captain, in a day or so. They're just getting ripe and luscious now; but, captain, have you heard anything of that Unknown Marksman lately?"

"Nothing since he killed the Indian, Smoky; but, then, that was a good riddance. He was a mean wretch, and because I reprimanded him

for cutting a log six inches short, to evade a knot, he quit working, and left. The next I heard of him he was dead. But that unknown enemy has killed some good, innocent men belonging to my force."

"The awful wretch," said the old man; "you are to rise up in your might and main, captain, and with your dogs and men hunt him down. If I wasn't so shaky with the weight of years, I'd be glad to join such a party. Pretty pass, indeed, where innocent men can't go out to work without being killed. I have been counting on a big sale this fall and winter, for the cranberry crop was never more promising; but if that dastard marksman keeps on killing people, no buyers will ever venture on such dangerous ground."

Captain Spencer saw that he would have no further opportunity of talking to Ida, for old Cranberry seemed determined to monopolize the whole time; and finally, breaking in upon a pause in the old man's conversation, he said:

"Well, as it is getting late, I shall have to be going toward the camp. I hope I may see you soon again," and he fixed his eyes upon Ida, who acknowledged his words with a smile and a bow, then put out her hand and kindly bid him good-by.

The next moment the old man and his pretty grandchild were moving slowly homeward.

When out of the captain's hearing, Ida asked:

"Grandpa, what do you think of Captain Spencer?"

"Oh, I think he's a very nice sort of a chap," replied the old man; "and now we're going to be busy a day or two gathering him those berries."

"Don't you think he asked me to marry him, grandpa?" continued Ida.

"Great salvation!" exclaimed the old fellow, as if astonished; "what does Captain Spencer want to marry a little, saucy whiffler like you for? Bah! he was joking you—teasing you, child."

"No, he was in real, downright earnest, grandpa."

"Ha! ha! ha!" chuckled the old berry-picker. "Captain Spencer in love with my Ida! Well, he'd make you a good husband, daughter, I expect; but, great Moses! he's old enough to be your father. He must be well on toward forty, while you are but seventeen. But what did you tell him?"

"That I'd think the matter over till I saw him again."

"Tell him no, child—tell him no. You are too young to marry; besides, we can't spare you from our home. Ah! there is your mother coming down to the landing to meet us. Wave your hat to her, the poor, good soul she is."

Ida did as requested, and in a few moments more they landed at the feet of a sad, pale-faced woman of some forty years.

"Were you uneasy, mother?" the maiden asked, as she sprung from her boat upon the green bank.

"Yes, child," she answered, "you know I am always uneasy when you and grandfather are away; and since that Unknown Marksman has been around, I cannot rest until I see you coming, for I know he is some crazy man shooting down people wherever he finds them. But come, supper is waiting you."

The three turned and walked slowly up the green hillside to the cabin.

Just as they reached the door the report of a rifle echoed in quavering intonations across the marsh, and the deep baying of hounds came trailing down the air from the wooded hills beyond.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT CAPTAIN SPENCER FOUND.

CAPTAIN SPENCER paddled back down the creek to where he had left his gun and dogs, with a look of disappointment upon his face. The man's true inward nature was now cropping out. The smile that had hitherto beamed upon his handsome face disappeared behind dark and sullen frowns that would have filled the heart of Ida Zane with fear and terror. That youthful air which he had so naturally assumed, now vanished, and the cold, hard lines of dissipation and anger appeared on the mobile features.

He busied himself with the paddle, and thought of his future course until he reached the point where he had left his dogs and gun. Landing, he loaded his canoe, then, taking up his rifle, set off through the woods toward his ranch, following along a well-beaten path or deer-trail. He now began to cast about him for game for the first time since he had left home. He had reached the wooded hill overlooking the Blue Marsh, when he suddenly caught sight of an animal moving across the brow of the ridge among the trees. A second glance told him that it was a deer; and the next moment his rifle was at his shoulder. As the report rung down through the forest aisles, the deer leaped into the air, and fell to its knees; but gathering itself, it rose to its feet and bounded away.

The captain saw that he had only wounded his game, and at once put his hounds upon the

trail. With a yelp they shot away through the woods, their deep-toned baying starting the echoes far and near.

Spencer followed—cutting across hills and hollows, guiding his course by the noise of his pack. For some time the chase seemed to be toward the south; but it finally turned east and at length changed round until it seemed to be coming right back toward the captain, who stopped and listened. As the baying of the hounds came nearer and nearer, he saw that the deer was going to pass near; so cocking his rifle, he waited, determined to try a shot upon the running game.

He had not very long to wait. The deer suddenly bounded past him so close that he could see the hot blood spurting from a wound in its side at every bound. The captain raised his rifle to fire, but the hounds were so close upon it that he dare not through fear of killing one of them.

Twenty rods further on the stag-hounds brought the game to a stand in a little opening, and the next moment the whole pack was upon it. Spencer hurried forward and called them off, but the deer was already dead. It was a fine, sleek doe, and as he stood regarding it with a hunter's admiration, he could not help admiring it above any he had ever killed. His dogs, panting around it, seemed to regard it with a half-human look; and while both the hunter and his pack stood by the dead animal, they were suddenly startled by the sound of approaching feet. Turning, the captain saw Davy Baun, one of his own regular hunters, approaching with a brace of wild turkeys in his hand, and a number of squirrels hanging to his belt.

"Hullo, capt'n!" exclaimed the old hunter, as he entered the opening, "what in mystery's name ye got thar, eh?"

"The sleekest deer you ever saw, Davy," replied the captain.

"By gee hokey, it is that, isn't it?"

"It looks as though it might have come out of some lady's parlor," added Spencer.

"Well, now, it does, don't it? and dog my cats if it didn't, captain! Look here, will ye? Do you see that, ole hoss? What do you make o' that, eh?"

As he spoke, the old hunter stooped and lifted the point of one of the animal's drooping ears, and to the surprise and wonder of the captain, he saw a tiny blue tassel hanging thereto.

"What an infernal blunder!" burst from his lips, "for it is somebody's pet deer, and has not come far, I dare say. It may belong to Old Cranberry, and having escaped from the island strayed off into the woods. Or it may belong at some settlement or lumberman's camp. At any rate, I regret having killed it."

"Well, dash it, capt'in, one don't expect to meet anything but wild deer in these woods—you're not to blame. All I've got ag'in' you is your makin' such a bunglin' shot. See there, where your bullet struck, and—Great monkeys! here's something else—a blue ribbon all stained with blood, and around the animal's neck in the bargain!"

"Worse and worse for me," said Spencer, regretfully, "for I know that some gentle heart and fairy fingers had something to do in putting these trinkets upon the deer. Perhaps some child, or perhaps some maiden, has thus tricked out his or her pet. Davy, remove the ribbon and hand it to me. I want to keep it as a relic of this day's hunt."

Davy broke the ribbon, and as he drew it from about the stiffening neck of the deer, he exclaimed:

"Just look thar, capt'in—there's a jewel on the ribbon, or I'm a born moon-eye."

"A tiny gold locket, as true as the heavens are above us," replied Spencer; "and now I remember Jack Day's saying that he saw a deer with a ribbon around its neck more than two weeks ago; but all scouted the idea as being absurd, and so nothing more was said about it. This must be the same deer—yes, this locket is real gold, with the initials—Well, let me see; they are nearly worn off, but I think they are 'H.' 'M.' And," he continued, holding the locket out before him in a reflective manner, "I'll swear I believe I have seen that locket before."

"Look inside of it, captain; mebby that'll tell ye somethin' 'bout it," suggested Davy.

With a nervous hand the captain pressed the spring and the locket flew open. There were two portraits in it—one was of a young and beautiful woman, and the other of a man equally as handsome. Spencer held the locket so that the light could fall upon the portraits, for they were very small. He turned and changed it as if in doubt as to what he saw. Baun saw his face turn white as a sheet as he gazed upon the pictures—he saw him fairly stagger and reel as if under a mental blow.

"What is it, capt'in?" the old hunter asked, himself growing uneasy at the captain's emotions.

Without a word, save a terrible oath, Spencer dashed the locket to the earth, then with clenched fists and blazing eyes turned as if to confront an imaginary foe. He was the very image of surprise and fury.

Old Davy picked up the locket and looked at

the pictures. An exclamation burst from his lips.

"Why, captain," he said, "this is a picture of yourself! What in the name of old Satan does it mean?"

"Curse the locket!" hissed the enraged lumberman. "I thought it perished with—long years ago. By heavens! she did wear it when—when—"

"Well, when what, capt'in?" interrupted Davy.

"None of your business," stormed the infuriated man, apparently transformed into a demon of anger.

"Beg pardon, cap'n," said Baun; "didn't mean to tread on your toes. I see this locket is a big surprise to you—a drap of gall to the sweetness of your temper. But who's this woman?—yer dead wife, eh?"

"Again I say, Davy Baun, it is none of your infernal business, and if you breathe a word of this to a living soul, I will murder you."

"Oh, I'll keep dark as a rainy night, capt'in," replied Baun; "but draw and quarter me if she isn't a real beauty. It's a pity she war cut off in her prime—that the cruel waters of fate quenched out the—"

"Man!" stormed Spencer, "what do you mean by this talk? Speak out, or I'll blow your head off."

"Go easy, capt'in; don't go off on a tangent," replied the old hunter, in a cool, calm tone that told he was not afraid of the blustering man. "I just mean that it was a pity such a beautiful woman was dead. I never see'd but one purtier critter than she, and that's Old Cranberry's gal. I tell ye, capt'in, that Ida Cranberry is a royal beauty. But all jokes aside: shall I dress this deer while you go up to the ranch and send a pack-mule down?"

"No; let it be for the vultures," replied Spencer; "it is accursed—let us leave it at once," and shouldering his rifle, Spencer called his dogs and started rapidly away as if fleeing from the vengeance of a pursuing Nemesis.

Davy Baun slipped the locket into his pocket, took up his gun and turkeys, and sauntered leisurely homeward, wondering to himself what terrible secret linked the captain's past life with the tiny locket.

CHAPTER IX.

BATTLING WITH THE WAVES.

WE left Old Wolverine, the Bee-hunters and the unknown victim of Nattie's rifle struggling in the wild waves at the foot of Spirit Rapids. Every man was compelled to act for himself when he found that life depended upon the most determined efforts.

Frank Ballard did not release the arm that he had seized at the same instant the boat upset—the arm of the struggling being that Nattie's shot had brought down. With that instinct, born of sudden danger, he clung to the arm, scarcely aware of what he was doing; but when he arose to the surface after his plunge into the water, he collected his thoughts and throwing himself upon his back, endeavored to support the struggling form at his side.

"Look out! look out!" yelled Old Wolverine, as he rose to the surface; "no bottom here, and water wetter'n Five Point julip. Wooh! how you makin' it, boys?"

"I'm coming," answered Ed Mathews; "where are you, Nattie and Frank?"

There was no response. Frank heard the question; but he was too busy to answer, for he had found that the form he supported was that of a woman still possessed of life.

Old Wolverine was an excellent swimmer, and he at once struck out for land. He landed some forty rods below the rapids, the current having carried him down before he could reach the shore.

"Here, boys, he yelled, "port your helms and put into the bay over here. Where are you, boys? Are you coming?"

One by one his dogs swam ashore, and finally Ed Mathews landed a few paces below. The moment the latter was out of the water he inquired after his friends, for he had seen none of them since the boat upset.

"All in but Nattie and Frank," said the wolf-hunter; then he shouted at the top of his lungs to the others. But there was no response save the echoes of his own deep voice; and now, for the first time, old Wolverine became uneasy about his friends.

"Could they both swim, Ed?" he asked.

"Yes; either one of them is a better swimmer than I. Nattie is the best of the three."

"Then I am afeared something has befallen them," Wolverine replied, in a serious tone.

In this he was nearly right, for Nattie, in falling from the boat, had struck his head upon a hidden rock and was partially stunned. Thus, half-unconscious, he was swept away down the river; and while he managed to keep his head above the water, he made no attempt toward getting ashore. With Frank Ballard it was different; clinging to the struggling form of the unknown woman, he began a desperate and heroic effort to reach the shore. He was an excellent swimmer, but with the burden of an almost lifeless body resting upon his arm, it seemed as though his efforts would be in vain.

But he battled with all his strength against the current which bore him rapidly down the stream; and when, at length, the last hope of escaping with his burden had nearly died out, a log floated near him, and he caught hold of it. With this providential support, hope and courage returned; and after a moment's rest he shouted for help. But no answer came back. He was not aware of the length of time he had been in the water, nor of the fact that he had floated over a mile down the stream.

Seeing that all depended upon his own strength, the young bee-hunter began another struggle, and finally succeeded in reaching the northern shore and depositing his burden on the beach. Then kneeling by the prostrate form, he unloosed the covering about the head and face, and found himself gazing down into the pale face of a beautiful woman. She was young—this he could see in the dim moonlight; but he could not distinguish the outlines of the whole features. Her form was enveloped in a white, gossamer rubber cloak.

Frank now found himself in another dilemma. He knew the woman was not dead, but felt satisfied that she had been wounded by Nattie's rifle, and was afraid she might die for want of such assistance as he could not render. If she could only speak, he might ascertain the extent of her injuries. He bent over her and spoke.

A moan escaped her lips; she moved slightly and tossed her hand feebly.

Frank raised her head and pillow'd it upon his breast. She threw up her hand and clasped his in a frantic grasp. Its touch thrilled the young bee-hunter to the heart. It seemed possessed of a mesmeric power.

"Lady," he at length said, in hopes she was regaining consciousness, "rest perfectly quiet; you are out of danger."

"Whose voice do I hear?—where am I?" she asked, half-delirious, and with a nervous start as though awakening from a dream.

Frank, too, started, and gazing down into her face, replied:

"You are on the river bank below the Rapids."

"Below the Rapids?" she exclaimed. "Oh, do not let them find me—they will murder me!"

Frank comforted her with the assurance of safety; and told her that his companion had not fired upon her with murderous intent; but to gratify a curiosity as to the Spirits of the Rapids.

While thus consoling her fears, the tread of feet suddenly arrested his attention, and turning his head he saw a tall Indian chief standing at his side with folded arms. At the same time he caught the glimmer of a camp-fire out in the woods to the right.

A shudder thrilled Frank's form as he remembered the treachery of an Indian that day, and he at once reached for his pistol. But to his surprise he found it was gone. He had lost it in the river. Laying the head of the helpless woman on the ground, he rose to his feet, and turning to the Indian demanded:

"Who are you that comes here?"

"Pokahgan, the chief of the Pottawatomies," was the prompt answer given in a kind tone.

"Is my white brother in trouble?"

He spoke English fluently, and the kindly tone in which he addressed Frank dismissed all fears from the latter's mind.

"I am glad to meet you, Pokahgan, for I am in trouble," he answered; "my lady companion is wounded."

"The camp of Pokahgan is yonder," the chief replied, pointing toward the glimmering light off in the woods; "I am the friend of the whites, and they are welcome there. They shall find comfort by my camp-fire, strength in the food of the red-man and cheer in the words of Pokahgan and his daughter. I will call my young men that they may carry the pale-face woman to our camp."

He uttered a low, plaintive whistle that immediately brought a dozen warriors down to the river.

The woman was then placed upon a blanket and gently carried to camp, Frank and the chief following behind in silence.

The warriors deposited their burden in the tent of the Princess Summer Rose, Pokahgan's daughter. Rose, as the dusky maiden was more familiarly called, did all in her power to make the woman comfortable.

Closing her tent, she removed the stranger's water-soaked clothing, and replaced them with dry ones from her own scanty wardrobe.

Meanwhile, Frank Ballard waited impatiently by the roaring camp-fire for Rose's decision as to the woman's wounds; and when she finally came out and informed him that the woman was not wounded at all, he was most happily surprised; but, at the same time, it only increased the mystery surrounding the Spirit Rapids and Castle Island.

Rose, a pretty little maiden with a pleasant face, and sparkling eyes, black as midnight, seemed greatly pleased over her pale-face protege, and spent all her time by the woman's side, administering to her wants and comfort.

Frank entered into conversation with Pokah-

gan. The chief was very friendly and communicative. He answered all of Frank's questions satisfactorily; he denied the truth of the reported Indian outbreak, but accounted for the rumor on the ground of his having threatened a certain party of lumbermen, in case they repeated certain acts of cruelty to his braves, whom the whites occasionally caught out in the woods hunting.

"These woods," the chief said, "have been the hunting-grounds of the red-men for many centuries; but they offer no insult to their white brothers; but the latter have accused us of shooting down their friends. This is false; it is the Unknown Marksman that slays them, not Pokahgan's braves."

"What do you think about the Unknown Marksman, Pokahgan?" Frank asked.

"Go ask the wind that mutters to the trees, and the shadows that lurk in the woods. They may tell; but Pokahgan cannot."

Between listening to the old chief, watching the movements of the little princess, and drying his clothes, Frank was kept engaged. He was surprised at his hospitable reception, and could not help admiring the sociability of Pokahgan and the wild beauty of his dusky child. His braves were also very kind and solicitous of their white guest's comfort.

The chief asked no questions. If he had any desire or curiosity to know under what circumstances Frank and the woman had happened to be cast upon the shore, he kept it concealed in mute silence.

Thus an hour had passed, when the princess came to the young bee-hunter and said:

"My white sister desires to see you in the wicket."

Frank arose, adjusted his clothing, which, by this time, was nearly dry, and advanced to the door of the tent. The apartment was lighted with a fat-lamp, and as he entered he saw the woman seated upon a pile of furs, with her head bowed upon her hand. When he spoke, she raised her face—a pale, sad and beautiful face, wreathed in a wealth of golden hair, that fell in rippling masses down over her shoulders and back. At sight of her, Frank started back with surprise and amazement written upon every lineament of his face.

"My God!" he exclaimed.

"Frank! Frank Ballard!" the woman cried, starting up and clasping his arm, "it is no delusion—it is Edith—she whom you once knew and loved as Edith Morse!"

"No, it cannot be," cried Frank; "she is dead—she was drowned—murdered by the fiend whom she called husband."

"You think so, Frank," the woman answered, with a bitter smile; "so does the world; but I still live."

"Edith, I have mourned you as dead these many years, and were it not for your face, that same sweet voice, and those same meek and loving eyes, I would believe you were an impostor. Why haven't I known that you were living before now?"

"I did not want you to know it, Frank. I was ashamed ever to meet you again; and when I recognized your voice speaking to Pokahgan, I was sorry you rescued me from the river. But, Frank, in all the years that we have been as dead to each other, I have not forgotten you."

"God bless you, my own darling. This seems like a dream to me. Little did I think that it was she whom I once loved that I was struggling with in the river. For years have I been trying to erase the past from my memory, for thoughts of it has brought nothing but pain to my heart. I came into these woods in the hope that the wild adventures of the woodman and bee-hunter's life would wear out my sorrow. Perhaps God directed me here, Edith."

"Perhaps," said Edith, a tremor in her voice, and that old-time love in her great, brown eyes; "but then," she continued, as if starting from a dream, her voice trembling with emotions of despair, "it can only reopen the old wound."

"Nay, nay, Edith; can you not be to me what you once were?" Frank asked, in passionate fervor.

"No, Frank, never," she said, half choking.

"Why not?" responded Ballard; "you know that Henry Mount is dead—was slain by an assassin—that no tie binds you to him?"

"Oh, Frank, Frank!" the woman cried. "I cannot tell you what I know—not now. Go on in your journey of life, Frank, and forget me."

"I never can, now, Edith, for I know you have been driven into a life of misery—first with Mount, and then into this exile life. I must know that you are safe, and have a friend and protector."

"Thank you, Frank, for your kind and generous wish. I am glad to learn that you know how it came that I married Mount."

"I know all, Edith—I know your uncle forced you to marry against your wish. But, tell me, Edith, do you reside upon Castle Island?"

She glanced around, as if to make certain that no one else was near, then replied:

"Yes."

"We took you for a spirit walking on the water, and my friend concluded to try a shot at you."

Edith's face lit up with a sad smile.

"I reside there with my brother, whom you never know, Frank; but the way we cross the rapids is a secret that none but our own party knows. Should you ever wish to visit the island, I will let you into the secret."

"Do so, Edith, for to tell you the truth, I have very recently conceived an admiration for this country, and shall remain here till—"

"Do not on my account," she interrupted.

"Edith, can I not think of you as Edith Morse? Can I not blot out the past five years and stand with you by the old turnstile, and hear the melody of your voice whispering vows of love again? Oh, Edith! do not drive me away. I know—"

"But, Frank, I am not, nor never can be, the Edith of those days. I have passed through a life since then that would make any woman a demon."

"It has not tarnished your soul, Edith. My own heart tells me that."

"But, Frank, there is still an impassable barrier between our lives, though our hearts may be together," she still persisted.

"What is it, Edith?" he asked, taking her hand in his and gazing down into her sorrowful eyes.

"I cannot tell you, Frank—not now," she replied. "I am under obligations of secrecy."

"Your husband, Henry Mount, is dead, and so I cannot imagine what it can be, unless you have married some other."

"I have not, Frank," she answered, "and—Oh, what is that?—what awful sound?"

The last words were occasioned by a deep sound breaking suddenly upon the stillness of the camp.

Frank ran out of the tent and found the Indians all standing in the attitude of listening; while, with their eyes shaded with their hands, they were endeavoring to peer into the gloom beyond the radius of light.

Not a breath of air was stirring, and the smoke from the camp-fire and Indians' pipes hung over the camp like a purple haze. In this, the Indians' forms, only half discernible, looked like a group of bronzed statues representing fear and surprise. They seemed transfixed to the spot.

Suddenly the deep baying of dogs broke upon the night. It was this sound that had first roused the camp. The Indians seized their guns. The baying of the dogs came nearer; and presently a huge bear, pursued by half a score of hounds, appeared within the light. It was coming directly toward the camp—it would pass through it.

Quick as a flash the Indians raised their guns and poured a deadly volley into the bear. With a fierce growl of mortal agony the animal reeled, staggered on and fell within twenty feet of the camp-fire, mortally wounded.

The hounds came on and sprung upon the dying beast, mad with the excitement of the chase.

The shouts of men and the clatter of hoofs came down the valley upon the trail of the bear and hounds, mingled with the occasional twang of a horn.

Then from the shadows of the woods appeared a dozen mounted hunters, wild with the excitement of the chase.

At their head, upon a foaming charger, rode Captain Randolph Spencer.

CHAPTER X.

TRouble in Camp.

A shout of joy burst from the lips of Spencer and his men when they saw that the bear had been caught, and that, too, in the heart of the Indian camp. They rode up, and, dismounting, hitched their horses and gathered round the bear.

"Good-evening, my brave old smoky-skin!" exclaimed Spencer, advancing to Pokahgan and giving him a rude, familiar slap on the shoulder; "howdy, brave warriors of the Pottawatomie, and—Hello! a white man"—to Frank Ballard—"good-evening, sir; all on your way to attend the foot-races at the Five Points, are you?"

"None of us are going there," answered Pokahgan.

"Oh, you are not?" replied Spencer; "we're going to have a grand old day of it. Free whisky, free fights, and free everything's the programme, smoky-skin."

Frank Ballard saw that the lumberman and his followers were under the influence of liquor, and he at once became fearful of some insult that would lead to trouble. The hunters were really boisterous, and in their pretended exuberance acted rudely toward those in whose camp they were unbidden guests.

"By Judas, old Pokey!" the captain remarked, after it was discovered that the Indians had slain the bear, "I'm glad you fellows floored old Bruin here, for we couldn't hit a better place for a bear-hunters' frolic. Boys, two or three of you slip the hide off that bear, dress up the meat, and we'll have a royal roast. And here, great chief of the Pockawockamies, is a bottle of choice old Burgundy, direct from the

distilleries of La Sod Cornus. It hasn't been touched yet, so take off the blossom."

Pokahgan shook his head and declined the proffered bottle, though in a courteous manner.

"What!" exclaimed Spencer, "tell me that you—a red skin—an Ingin, don't drink? Pokey, that's too transparent."

"The fire-water of the pale-face is not good. When it goes in, it uses go out—make one a big fool," was the chief's response.

"Whew—eh!" whistled the captain; "hear that, will you? Well, well; the millennium has come—not an Ingin here 'll take a drink. Oh, Jerusalem! Jerusalem! But, stranger of the white skin, will you not have a drink with me?"

"Thank you; I never drink, sir," answered Ballard.

"Well, I'm glad of it—leaves all the more for me. Here, boys, is to your happiness, old Pokey's joy, and the success of these red teetotalers," and turning the bottle to his lips, he let its contents gurgle down his throat without once stopping to take breath. His example was immediately followed by his men, each of whom was provided with a bottle of liquor.

The prospect for a drunken carousal now became too certain, and Frank Ballard tried to conceive some plan by which to get Edith and the princess, Summer-Rose, out of danger. He knew the Indians would be unable to restrain the lumbermen from acts of violence, for their force was, numerically, the strongest.

In a few minutes the bear had been skinned and cut up into quarters. Each of the hounds was provided with a chunk of meat; then pieces were sliced from the choicest portions of the hind-quarters and placed before the fire on long sticks to roast. Soon the air was filled with the aroma of roasting bear-meat, and it seemed to have appealed to the better nature of the drunken men through a keen appetite, for they became comparatively quiet.

The princess had hid herself in the tent when the hunters came storming into camp, but when she thought all danger was past, she ventured out again. No sooner, however, did Captain Spencer see her than he sprang to her side with an oath of surprise, and throwing his arm about her waist, kissed her before she was scarcely aware of his intention.

"The pale-face captain is not a gentleman," said Pokahgan, indignantly, as he started from his seat, his eyes burning with a fire of resentment for the insult offered his daughter.

"Well, what are you going to do about it, Pokey?" returned the lumberman, defiantly.

"The Pottawatomies are not cowards," the chief answered, his eyes flashing with a fierce determination.

"Neither are we old lumbermen," added Spencer.

"You should remember that you are in our camp, and that the red-man treats the white man kindly," responded Pokahgan.

Meanwhile, the princess had darted back into her tent almost frightened out of her wits. She found Edith trembling in every limb with terror.

"Oh, princess!" she cried, in a subdued tone, "I must flee from here—they will see me!"

At this very juncture, one of the lumbermen advanced to the tent and drawing aside the flap-door looked in upon the women.

"Great shockin'!" he called out, "here's a white gal in here, too; and she's prettier than a pictur, I swar she be. I never see'd anything to beat her, boys."

"Lead her out! trot her out!" yelled the captain, and his words were repeated by his men.

"Dare to touch her," said a voice behind the intruding lumberman, "and you shall die!"

It was the voice of Frank Ballard who spoke thus, for the soul of the young bee-hunter was aroused. A terrible light blazed in his eyes, and his face became blanched with the deadly resolve that took possession of his mind. In his hand he held an Indian hatchet snatched from the belt of one of the red-men. He was ready to die in defense of the only woman he had ever loved.

The lumbermen, ready for a conflict in which they knew that their superior numbers would give them the advantage, immediately drew their knives and pistols. The Indians, in whom patience and forbearance had reigned to be a virtue, unloosened their hatchets and unsheathed their hunting-knives; and thus in a minute's time twenty men had arrayed themselves in an attitude of deadly hostility.

One of the lumbermen named Kruger, a villainous-looking French Canadian, and an unerring pistol-shot, drew his revolver and leveled it upon the heart of Frank Ballard. One movement of the young bee-hunter toward executing his threat, was to be the signal for Kruger to fire.

The silence of death—the calm preceding the bursting of the storm—settled over the camp. Even the hounds, gnawing at the bones of the bear, ceased their meal, as if imbued with the awful spirit of the moment. The ruddy glow of the camp fire danced and shivered over the motionless forms of the men. Knives in the hands of bearded lumbermen flashed and gleamed in the light. Like tigers ready to leap upon their

prey the Indians stood, inclining slightly forward, their eyes fixed upon the forms of the whites as if held there by some horrible fascination. Calm and erect, and with blazing eyes, Frank Ballard stood ready to brain the man who dared to insult Edith; while, cool and determined, Kruger held his revolver upon the breast of the young bee-hunter.

In this position the enemies remained several moments—moments that seemed hours so great was the terrible suspense.

"Trotter," Captain Spencer ventured to say, in a measured tone fraught with a tremor, to the man who stood under the hatchet of Ballard, "go in and bring out that white woman."

Trotter glanced around him preparatory to precipitating the conflict. The heart of every one leaped into his throat; the fingers of every man tightened upon his weapon; the sinews in every frame became strung to their highest tension. A quiver seemed to thrill each form that swayed and trembled like a great tree before it loses its balance and goes crashing and thundering to earth.

A moment more would have precipitated the conflict, but, before even this time had elapsed, a rifle in the hands of an unseen foe—a foe in the darkness—rang out, and Kruger's hand fell at his side, his head fell upon his breast, his knees gave way, and he sunk down like an ox in the shambles.

A comrade sprung to his side and raised his head; but life was already extinct; a bullet through the forehead had killed him instantly.

Captain Spencer turned deathly pale. He put up his pistol and advancing to Kruger's side bent over him and in a husky tone said:

"The Unknown Marksman is abroad!"

CHAPTER XI.

MORE VISITORS IN POKAHGAN'S CAMP.

In an instant the threatening conflict had been stayed and the lumbermen, wild with fear and horror, gathered around the fallen comrade, whose hand, but a minute before, had been raised to smite a fellow-being. Even Pokahgan and his warriors were diverted by the fatal shot, and superstitious fear written upon their dusky faces. Frank Ballard alone remained unmoved, for he could be but thankful to the providential yet mysterious agent that had saved his life, and rescued Edith from the power of the drunken lumbermen.

Captain Spencer, however, soon recovered from his emotions of fear, and burst into a storm of furious rage. He heaped curses upon the unknown destroyer, upon Frank Ballard, and, in fact, everybody and thing that seemed instrumental in thwarting his villainous designs.

"By the eternal heavens!" he exclaimed, "I will hunt that destroyer down this minute. Trotter, turn Cube and Moro loose."

The man addressed did as directed, and at once uncoupled two fierce-looking Cuban bloodhounds and turned them loose.

Then the enraged lumberman went charging out into the night with the dogs. Here and there through the woods in a circle he beat his way—urging on his dogs and cursing in impotent fury. For nearly an hour he kept up the search, but all in vain. Finally he returned to camp to find that the assembly had been increased by the arrival of two men and six dogs. The new-comers were El Mathews and Old Wolverine. The latter Spencer knew and rather disliked; and the moment he saw him there, a vague suspicion passed through his mind.

"Hullo, capt'in," the old wolf-hunter exclaimed, as Spencer came tearing into camp like a mad bull, "what's the matter o' you? Don't chaw yer head off—keep cool, man."

"Keep cool the deuce!" retorted the captain; "can a man keep cool when some accursed prowler is shooting down his men? Look there!" and he pointed to the body of the French Canadian, Kruger. "Wolverine," he continued, "did you, or that man with you, fire that shot? Are either of you the Unknown Marksman?"

"Well, now, capt'in, you're axin' a question we'd be fools to answer if it war in the affirmative; but, seein' we're not the Unknown, I can easily tell ye so. Our guns lay in the bottom of Black river, and if ye'll feel our clothes you'll perceive that we're wetter'n Five Pint julip—bott' upset and spilt us out. No, capt'in, it's not probable that we could shoot a man without a gun. Now what's yer excellency's opinion?"

The captain appeared to accept Wolverine's story as true, yet he held some grave doubts as to the true relation of the old hunter and the Unknown Marksman.

"Well," he replied, "I shall not cease hunting for that destroyer until he is dead."

"Captain," said Trotter, "mebby the slaver dodged into the tent with the weemin fo'ks."

Without a word Spencer strode to the tent, and, before he could be prevented, lifted the flap and looked inside. But he found it dark and deserted.

"The thing is empty!" he exclaimed, starting

back; then, turning to the chief, he demanded: "Pokahgan, where are the women?"

"None of your business," was the chief's indignant reply, and he faced the captain as if to smite him.

Spencer drew up to strike the chief, but Old Wolverine interposed, saying:

"Gently, capt'in, gently; you might strike a torpedo."

Spencer was afraid of Wolverine, as, in fact, was every man in the woods; besides, there was something like a threat in the old hunter's tone that caused him to desist from striking the chief.

"I'll not, Wolverine," he replied, "because you request it. But never mind, chief; there's a hereafter."

Then Spencer turned aside, and picking up a light sawl that he had seen upon the princess's head a few minutes before, stepped out into the darkness, held the garment to the nose of one of his hounds, then started off in search of the fugitive woman.

But as he left the camp, the princess returned alone. A minute later the bay of the dogs sounded through the night. Pokahgan now mistrusted the villain's intention for the first time, and in a low tone he said to Wolverine:

"The white captain trails a woman as he would a deer. He is a sneaking wolf."

"Is that so?" exclaimed the old wolf-hunter; "then by the Arabian Knights, I'll trail him. Here, Baltic; come along, you old lummix, if you want a bite of villain."

"Stay, pale-face," said the princess, laying her hand upon the old hunter's arm; "the Great Spirit will take care of my white sister."

"Well, I reckon as what you ort to know, little one," said Wolverine, turning back; "but I'll sw'ar that man's either crazy or drunk; and, boys, you'd better, look arter him, or he might git the stuslin' pounded outen him. Now, what now, Mellow Tongue? Ho! ho! as I'm a born critter, here comes old Gershom Thee-Thou, the Quaker. Howdy, Gershom! Blast yer ole picters, how does it come you're here?"

"I was going up the river and saw this light and heard a great noise, and so straightway I came over to see what hee were doing, for I supposed theo were a set of very great lunatics."

This man, Gershom Bland, was a veritable Quaker of some five and thirty years of age. His face was smoothly shaven and almost concealed under a slouched broad-brimmed hat. Under his right arm hung a leather pouch bearing the letters and word, "U. S. Mail." Gershom Bland was well known as the mail-carrier between the Five Points and the Indian village and settlement of Alleghan, where many whites resided. He usually traveled on foot, though, at times, when the roads were in bad condition, he would make the journey in a canoe, as his route lay along the river. He carried no arms, for his religious scruples would not permit of violence to either man or beast; and so, altogether, he was known as an innocent, harmless creature.

"Well, Gershom," said Old Wolverine, "I am trooly glad to see you here, for your presence brings a sort of peace and quietude with it. Things have been goin' a little strong for men of our proclivities. Violence has been done here to night, and one of our friends lies dead. The Unknown Marksman has been killin' round here to night."

"Ah!" exclaimed Gershom, sadly, "that abominable creature haunts the woods like a demon. Verily, the people should rise up and hunt him as they would a buck, and make peace with him."

"Oh, go 'long with your kind o' peace," returned Wolverine. "I'd say hang him, shoot and quart r him."

"Ah, me, Wolverine, thee are very sinful; but, changing the subject, hast thee seen my friend Running Deer, the Chippewa, who carries the mail to Barkopolis? and my friend, Sandy Gray, who carries it to Camp Spencer?"

"No; I haven't seen 'em, Gershom," replied Wolverine.

"They were to have met me here to-night in Pokahgan's camp, for we knew he was going to camp near the rapids," continued the Quaker. "Running-D'er was going down, and Sandy Gray up. We frquently meet on our routes, or where they come together just below the Spirit Rapids. Ah! call in your beasts, friend Wolverine, for some one comes."

The hunter's dogs had dashed out at some one approaching through the woods, but they were promptly called back and quieted by their master. The next moment "Sandy" Gray, one of the two mail-carriers inquired after by the Quaker, made his appearance—swinging along at an easy, careless gait.

He was a man somewhere along in thirty years; one could not judge exactly on account of the great shock of sandy hair and whiskers that almost covered his face. He was dressed in buck-skin breeches and moccasins, but the rest of his suit was after a more civilized style.

He was armed with a double-barreled rifle—a heavy smooth-bore with a stock that proclaimed its ancient origin. In addition to his rifle and bullet-pouch he also carried a mail-bag similar to that of Gershom's.

The lumbermen all hailed the appearance of "Sandy" Gray, as he was generally known, with a shout; for to them he was well known, having, for the past year, made weekly trips to Camp Spencer with the mail for its citizens.

"Ho, Sandy, ole fellow," exclaimed one, "glad to meet you—got a letter for me?"

"Can't tell you, Bluford; the bag's locked and the keys are at the camp," responded Sandy, leaning his gun against a tree, and seating himself before the fire with that indifferent ease of one accustomed to camp life.

"Rip the bag open and let's see what's in it," suggested one, with a drunken ejaculation.

"Not much, unless you rip me first, for I've sworn to cherish and protect the mail until death did us part, so help me John Rodgers," Sandy replied.

"Well, where in the plague did you get this gun?" asked another, taking up Sandy's rifle.

"Traded Running Deer outen it as we went down last week," he answered, as he thrust a chew of tobacco into his mouth.

"Well, it's a huge old affair, Sandy—smooth-bore—throwing over an ounce ball, I should judge. Why didn't you get a howitzer and be done with it?"

"I tell ye, boys, she's a ripper," replied Sandy, producing one of the bullets for inspection; "you can fist that daylight right through a bear with it every pull; and a catamount—why, blest if you can find hide nor hair of a caty hit with one o' em. It's heavy, that's troo, but then that plaguey, old, long-barrel Kaintucky that I had, got so rickety in the joints that she'd hardly hold together, and so I traded her to Running Deer. She'd been jist the thing for Gershom, there. But say, Gersh, I bin a-look for Running Deer in to-night yet, for all he's had time to 'a' been here. What's Cap. Spencer, boys?"

"Out arter a coon," said one of the lumbermen.

Following close upon the heels of his dogs Randolph Spencer was led to the river's bank. Here the trail seemed to have ended, for his hounds, looking out over the river, barked fiercely.

"Ha, she has crossed the river," the villain said to himself, "but here is a canoe, and I will follow."

He leaped into the light craft, called in his dogs after him, and at once sailed rapidly for the opposite shore. He had scarcely left the beach when a lithe, shadowy figure glided from the bushes behind him, and, crouching low, watched him across the river—then disappeared in the dark woods.

Spencer soon landed on the opposite shore, and the moment his hounds were upon the bank a deep baying announced that they had found the trail on the other side.

Like a deer, the half-inebriated lumberman bounded away up the river after his dogs. He followed them until the roar of Spirit Rapids burst like thunder upon his ear—almost drowning the voice of his dogs; but still he lanced on through moonlight and shadows, woods and thicket. On toward the rapids he followed his hounds until, at length, the sweeping tide, with its veil of overhanging mist, was before him. Here dogs and master came to a halt.

Once more the former approached the water's edge and bayed the opposite shore.

Spencer looked out across the foot of the rapids and saw the shadowy form of a woman disappearing in the mist of the island shore.

"Flames of purgatory!" hissed the man, as he saw his game escaping, and that too by a way that was clothed in mystery to him. "What does that mean? The devil is helping that woman, whoever she may be. But we can go no further, that's certain."

He called his dogs and turned back down the river.

"By the living furies!" he soliloquized. "I will know who that woman is—I will probe the mystery of that island—yea! by the gods of Olympus, I will find that Unknown Marksman or die. I'm beginnin to get my eyes open now, fool that I have been. I will go back to camp and murder every Indian and vagabond there for thwarting my plans. I wouldn't begrudge a dozen such men as Kru or now, if I had only seen the face of that woman. Curses upon the whole kit! I'll make them sweat."

By the time he had reached the car of Spencer had worked himself up into a perfect paroxysm of rage and vengeance. He hastily recrossed the river and went charging into camp, his lips reeking with threats and profanity.

He was taken, somewhat, by surprise, however, when he discovered that there had been three more persons added to the party at camp since he had left.

Two of these new-comers, Sandy Gray and Gershom Bland, who had already roosted. The third was a Chippewa Indian, named Run-

ning Deer, and whom the other two had been expecting. This Indian was a lithe, supple fellow, with features of Anglo-Saxon cast, and a remarkably intelligent expression. He was straight as an arrow and possessed an eye sharp and keen as a hawk's, and a movement as graceful and silent as a cat's. He was an exception to the general class of his tribe in having acquired some education of his white friends. He could read and write, and seemed as well informed upon the general topics of the day as the average white man of that day and country. He was also a mail-carrier, and the boon companion of Gershom Bland and Sandy Gray. In addition to the leather mail-pouch he possessed, he carried a rifle, whose long barrel and stock of equal length denoted its age.

Captain Spencer hesitated to precipitate trouble when he discovered this acquisition to the Indians' forces. He knew they would act with the red-skins in case of a difficulty; and if so, the odds were now against him; and so he concluded to keep quiet. He addressed the carriers with an apparent indifference, but betrayed his inward surprise and suspicions by walking to where their guns were leaning against the tree and taking them up, one at a time, and examining the bore with a critical eye. Thoughts of the Unknown Marksman were in his mind when he did so, and had he not been so frustrated by anger and surprise, he would never have betrayed his thoughts so openly as to take up the guns and examine them. To his joy, or disappointment, however, he found the bore of both rifles large enough to carry an ounce ball; and he was rifleman enough to know that a large bore could not throw a small bullet with anything like the force and accuracy the copper bullets of the Unknown Marksman were thrown.

"Sandy," he said, turning aside, as if to conceal his thoughts betrayed by his acts, "hav'n't you got a letter for me?"

"Don't know, Cap.; I'm only carrier—not postmaster," replied Sandy, in his easy, familiar way.

The captain turned, and walking around to where his men were grouped, sat down before the fire.

Old Wolverine, seated upon the ground, and leaning against a tree, whistled "Over the hills and far away," softly to himself; while Baltic lay with his head upon his master's lap fast asleep.

The death of their friend Kruger cast a deep gloom over the spirits of the lumbermen—not because they thought so much of Kruger as a man and companion, but they knew they were exposed to the dangers of the Unknown Marksman also; and after some wrangling among themselves, they took the body of their friend and turned their footsteps toward Camp Spencer.

A smile wreathed Old Wolverine's lips as the last of the party disappeared from view. He rubbed his hands with glee, laughed softly to himself, then resumed his position of ease and low, flute-like whistling.

Pokahgan and his men now seemed greatly relieved, and at once entered into conversation with their welcomed guests. The princess, her pretty brown face radiant with inward joy, talked with Frank Ballard and Ed Mathews—using language that not only surprised them, but won their admiration and esteem.

Presently Running Deer, Sandy Gray and Gershom Bland, the mail-carriers, expressed their intention of resuming their different courses; and when about ready to start, Running Deer glanced toward Sandy's double-barreled rifle and muttered:

"You cheated me, Sandy Gray."

"Me cheated you?" exclaimed Gray, in open-mouthed wonder; "how? when? where?"

"When we traded rifles. You misrepresented your gun."

"Oh, indeed-ah?" returned Sandy, half-contemptuously; "well, sir, I'm glad you mentioned the fact, for I rather hated to do it. The truth of it is, however, I consider myself cheated, and if you want to rue back, why, back she goes. That ole double-barreled rifle is a nuisance to any man. It's a heavier load than I want to tote up and down this river, for all the shots I get. I haven't had the chance of a double shot yet; so you can just take yer old plug-ugly back and welcome, and hand me over my old Kentucky belle. She's good enough fur me, even if her breechin' are busted."

Without another word the two men swapped back the guns that were so distasteful to them. One seemed as anxious as the other to have his own piece back, and as soon as the exchange had been effected, the three mail-carriers took their departure.

"That's a trio o' gaudy United States officials," remarked Old Wolverine to Frank and Ed, as the three men moved away; "I should think Uncle Sam would be proud o' them."

"How long have they been carrying the mail?" asked Frank Ballard.

"A year or more, I believe, since they took the contract; and half the time they've never had a letter or paper to pack—a dead expense

to the country, you see. It'd be a good thing if the Unknown Marksman would abolish them fellers."

"That Unknown Marksman is a mysterious creature," said Ed, fixing a close look upon the wolf-hunter.

"Ya-as," drawled Wolverine, "he's a spankin' good shot—alers takes 'em square peatwixt the eyes."

"Well, you have never give us your opinion of him, Wolverine," Ed remarked.

"I've had so many opinions 'bout the critter that I've entirely run out. Nearly every man in the country has been arrested on 'spicion o' bein' the demon; but not a man o' 'em was ever found to have a gun throwin' as little a ball as the Onkown's, or to have a copper bullet 'bout his pants. Oh, it's a mystery! by the 'Rabian Knights it is. But if everybody 'd turn out and make a big hunt for the critter, I think he could be found; but then every man seems to be so busy that he never thinks of the demon till he spats a comrade over, and even then it's forgotten afore the dead is under the sod."

"I hope if our young friend, Nathan, escapes the river's embrace, he may escape that demon also. I am inclined to think that he was swept away down the river, and in all probability met our missing friend and guide, Goliah Strong, when he got ashore."

"It was queer what become of that boy, I swear," said Wolverine, "as well as your guide. But it's my candid opinion that he was drowned, boys, else we'd 'a' hearn somethin' o' him. If he'd escaped, he'd surely come back and looked for his friends, just as we looked for him. It's too bad, I declar', for that boy war a noble youngster—braver than a lion, and gallant as a knight of old—hullo, thar! rip—bang she goes!"

The last words were occasioned by the crash of a rifle through the night up the river; and the next moment the clatter of horses' hoofs were heard approaching. Then a horse dashed out of the darkness—swept down past the camp, wild with terror. It was riderless, but upon the saddle and the blanket upon its back there were splashes of blood.

CHAPTER XII.

EXCITEMENT AT THE FIVE POINTS.

The Five Points of Michigan had obtained a local reputation as notorious as the Five Points of New York. There was, however, a vast difference in the two. While the latter was located in the midst of a populous city, the former was situated in the deep wooded valley of the Black River, and derived its name from the five different roads converging there from all directions.

The Five Points of the Black river was a great resort for the rude characters that formed a large per cent. of the different settlements, lumbering districts, and bark-peelers' and shingle-weavers' camps.

The chief attraction of the place was a tavern known by the name of the Free Pitch Inn, to which was attached a grocery and post-office. Liquors of the most effective kind were dealt out at the bar of the Free Pitch; and nearly every Saturday and Sunday, for the Sabbath was not very closely observed in the Michigan pines, crowds of lumbermen went down to the Points to spend the week's wages, and hobnob glasses with a dirty Pottawatomie, a blanketed Chippewa, and perhaps, a sedate Quaker would lay aside his religious scruples, for the time being, and take a friendly bumper with the burly log-rollers.

Free fights, in which both parties generally had fair play, horse-racing and gambling were the accompanying amusements that conspired to render the Points, in the nomenclature of the country, "a whole-souled place."

The proprietor of the Free Pitch Inn was an enterprising genius, who had received his education on the Mississippi river as a raftsmen; and what he did not know of all pertaining to this class of men could not be taught him by his associates. Therefore, Phil Strahl knew exactly how to cater to his customers' wants and desires, and at the same time encourage the plethoric condition of his pocket-book. He taxed his fertile brain to its utmost to plan entertainments for those who looked to the Points for whisky and amusements. Shooting-matches and horse-racing had become somewhat monotonous, and at length the idea of a foot-race occurred to him as a novelty; and so he set the time for the race, and offered a premium of a silver watch to the first best, and a revolver to the second. Of course these were fine premiums, all considered, and there was scarcely a man under forty in all the country but what was under practice in anticipation of carrying off the prize; and when the day for the race arrived, all set out for the Points in fine condition and high spirits.

Two men ridng from the lumber district east of the Points were discussing the subject of Phil Strahl's entertainment.

One of these men was Captain Randolph Spencer; the other was a gentleman, for such his appearance indicated, from South Haven. He was agent for the great saw-mills there, and had been up to Camp Spencer to engage a

vast quantity of logs for his company; and having concluded his business, had started home that morning. As his route lay past the Points, he and the captain were keeping each other company that far.

"So you have a big time at the Points today, captain?" the agent remarked, after a brief silence.

"Yes," replied the captain, "for the want of something better we have foot-racing there to-day, Olympian games, you see, Mr. Earl."

"Certainly," replied Mr. Earl, with a smile; "but I suppose you fellows have got to have some sport along with your work; they say all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy."

"That's it, exactly: we get tired of this eternal logging, and would go stark mad if we couldn't have some diversion. It is real downright music to hear some other sounds than the ring of axes, the rebounding roar of falling trees, and the curses and yells of ox-drivers. Still I like logging. I've been years at the business, and it's got to be second nature to me. There's always some excitement to keep a man's blood circulating lively. Once I pulled through an Indian outbreak, and that, too, when I had to keep half my men under arms to guard the rest while they worked. But I filled my contract, while the Mariposa gang were driven out, and the Bullrush gang ki—swept from existence by the enemy throwing their floodgates open upon them one night when they were fishing below the dam," and Captain Spencer glanced uneasily around him as he spoke, as though he feared that the inhuman monsters that had committed the Bullrush tragedy lurked near.

"How long has it been since those Bullrush people were destroyed?" asked Earl.

"About three years, I believe," answered Spencer.

"I heard about the affair at the time," said Mr. Earl, "though I never heard whether the villains that opened the dam upon them had been apprehended or not."

"I believe not."

"Well, it was a sad affair."

"Oh, yes; but such things will happen in a country like this where law and order are not known. At this time the general mind is agitated by a new excitement."

"Indeed?" exclaimed the mill-agent; "may I inquire what it is?"

"It is called the Unknown Marksman, and is shrouded by a complete mystery."

"One of those mysteries we read of in novels," remarked the agent, with a pleasant smile.

"You know, my dear Earl, that it is a trite old saying that truth is stranger than fiction. Fiction may have a parallel case with the Unknown Marksman; and, be that as it may, what I tell you is altogether too true. What makes the mystery more profoundly startling, the Unknown Marksman is a bloody assassin."

"Then why don't you call him the Unknown Assassin and hunt him down?"

"I was the first to call him the Unknown Marksman," replied Spencer, "for about a year ago I was going down the river on a raft when he fired into our tent and cut the spot out of the center of a card in my hand. The shot came from the shore; as we knew not who fired it I called him by the name he is now known. The bullet lodged in the table around which we were seated; and cutting it out we found it to be a small copper ball. That night Josh Myers, one of my men, was killed by a copper bullet shot from an unseen rifle. Since then several persons have been killed in a mysterious way—all shot through the head with a small bullet, and that bullet invariably found, when found at all, to be copper. We have hunted days in and days out for the demon, but can find no trace of him. We have arrested every suspicious character within fifty miles of here, but have never found the least evidence of guilt. Even some of my men, different hunters, and three well-known mail-carriers have all undergone the most rigid search; still the whole thing lies wrapped in a profound mystery. The Unknown Marksman seems to be an invisible being haunting our woods."

"Well, really," exclaimed Mr. Earl, "that is strange—horrible!" and he shuddered at the thought of an unknown assassin haunting the dark and lonely woods through which he must soon make his way alone.

"Nowadays," continued Spencer, "we all go well-armed. You can scarcely find a man, red or white, saint or sinner, but what carries a revolver or rifle."

"It seems to me, that if the proper steps are taken, you can rid your country of this assassin; for nothing of the material world could elude you always."

"Very true, Mr. Earl; but you know not what a class of people we have in the pines. Such an air of mystery enshrouds this assassin that it has filled nearly every man with superstitious fear. A man may be brave and outspoken in the sunlight; but let him step into the shadows of the woods alone where his own footfalls sound ghostly, and you will see his eyes dilate, his form assume a position of stealth and caution, and his head bend in an attitude of in-

tense listening. Yes, Mr. Earl, shadows are the lurking-place of danger—darkness the home of Death."

Mr. Earl felt the force of his companion's assertion, and for awhile remained silent.

They rode on and finally arrived at the Points.

Mr. Earl did not stop, but pursued his homeward journey.

Captain Spencer dismounted, ordered his horse stabled, and then entered the bar of the Free Pitch Inn.

There were none present but the innkeeper, for it was still early morn.

The two at once entered into an animated conversation which lasted some minutes, when it was interrupted by the entrance of a man carrying a long-barreled rifle and a leather pouch.

This new-comer was Sandy Gray, the mail-carrier, who was greeted by Captain Spencer with an invitation to walk up to the bar and "comfort." Sandy having no objection to a dram, readily accepted; and stepping up to the bar, drank to the captain's health. This was frequently repeated, the captain always taking a double draught; so that in a short time he began to feel the effects of it.

Presently another individual, wearing a meek look upon his face, entered the room and deposited a leather bag upon the counter of the post-office department. This man was Gershom Bland, the Quaker mail-carrier to Barkopclis.

"Ho, Gershom, my good man!" exclaimed the captain; "I am really glad to meet you."

"Thee seems in a better humor than when thee were in Pokahgan's camp the other night," replied Gershom, with a bland smile.

"Yes, I am feeling better," returned the lumberman, "for you know our bear-hunt terminated rather disastrously. I hope the next hunt I go on will be for that infernal marksman that killed Kruger."

"Ah, me," sighed Gershom, "I wish thee could make peace with the Unknown Marksman."

"If I ever git my eyes on him I'll make peace with him, now mind."

"Thee are of a sinful nature, friend Spencer."

"I can't help it, Gershom; but say, come up here and be comforted, won't you?"

"Verily, captain, it is against my principle to partake of liquor."

"I know it is on general principles, Gershom; but since you are feeling fatigued and warm, I assure you it will do you good."

"Art thee morally certain of what thee says?" asked Gershom, glancing at the brimming glasses as if arguing a point in his mind.

"I know it, Gershom," answered Spencer.

"Then, peradventure, I will taste of the ungodly stuff with thee, that I may be better acquainted with its nature so as to warn others."

With a sly wink at Sandy Gray, Captain Spencer passed the Quaker a glass of whisky. The latter received it with an unctuous smile, placed the glass to his lips, and with an evident groan of distress, drank the whole at a single gulp.

"Verily, it is abominable stuff," he said, wiping his lips, and turning away; "it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder." Ay, here comes friend Obed Smiley, a teacher of Mennonite faith, whose scruples are very strict. Friend Obed, I greet thee with good wishes."

"Joy to thee, friend Gershom," was the reply of the Mennonite teacher, as he entered the room and stood his gun on the floor, then extended his broad palm to the Quaker.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Spencer. "I notice, Obed, that you and Gershom meet here frequently to have a social time. Who says Sunday-school folks don't like their toddy?"

"We cultivate sociability," replied Obed, avoiding the captain's eyes as though he feared them; "it is a religious duty we take pride in. Peace on earth and good will to men is our beacon-light."

"But don't you seek a little of that peace in a quiet 'bumper?'" questioned the lumberman.

"Never, never!" replied the Mennonite, disdainfully. "I have resided at Alleghan and upon the frontier long years, and have yet to look on wine when it is red."

"But you seem to lose sight of one religious scruple in your close adherence to another. Does not your faith disapprove of violence and bearing arms?"

"It does, friend Spencer; but I carry a gun for self-protection, and use it then only when moral suasion fails in its good power. Moreover it has been decreed by the people as advisable for all to go armed to protect himself from that stealthy foe who respects no color—no religion—no sex, the Unknown Marksman. But I have never had occasion to raise my gun against man or beast."

"Amen," exclaimed Gershom, in a lugubrious tone.

"You're mistaken, Obed; the marksman has never killed a woman or a Quaker," said Spencer.

"So much to his credit," added Obed.

"Wal, boys," chimed in Sandy Gray, "you may stick to yer faith clus as a leech; but, mind what I tells ye, old Sandy'll shoot whenever he gits a chance—yes, thank ye, and I'll drink too."

The lumberman had ordered drinks for four, and invited Sandy, Gershom and Obed to partake.

"Verily, friend Spencer," said Gershom, "I have already pronounced my aversion to the abominable stuff, and so I must refuse thee on principle."

"Amen!" shouted Obed.

"Obed," said the captain, "you say you cultivate sociability; now, wherein would there be any harm in you Christians taking a glass with Sandy and I? Do you wish to cut my friendship by refusing?"

"Not at all, friend Spencer," replied Obed, "but even if I were so predisposed, a feeling akin to a violent cramp in the stomach would prevent my drinking."

"There's nothing in the world better for colic than just whisky," said Spencer.

"No, nothing," affirmed Phil Strahl.

"Nothing, eh?" asked Obed, in surprise; "then I will take a measure to try its medicinal properties, for I suffer a great deal with cramps in the stomach."

"And verily, it is a wise old saw that says, 'An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,'" said the Quaker, advancing to the bar; "and, peradventure, I will try the virtue in the sinful stuff in counteracting the influence of the malaria along my route."

And so the four took the glasses and lifted them to their lips. The Mennonite sipped at his and grimaced as though it were liquid torture; while the Quaker closed his eyes, tipped the glass, and let the liquor run down his throat with apparent delight.

As they replaced the glasses on the counter, Gershom said:

"Sinful stuff—the beverage of Satan. What say thee, friend Obed?"

"Amen!" was the solemn response.

At this juncture the inmates of the Free Pitch Inn were startled by a horseman, who dashed up to the door of the tavern, hatless and terrified—his horse covered with foam and panting with exhaustion.

"My God, Jubal Osgood!" exclaimed Captain Spencer, rushing out into the yard; "what's wrong? What's the matter, man?"

"Captain," the man fairly gasped, as he sat half-turned in the saddle, gazing back along the route he had come as if fearing pursuit, "Joe Wiltz is dead! He—he was shot dead at my side, as we were coming down the road by that Unknown Marksman! And that's not all: I saw that dreaded being—that terrible scourge of the—"

"What, you saw—"

"The Unknown Marksman—stood face to face with him! Oh, Lord, captain!"

And the man shook in the saddle as if with anague chill.

CHAPTER XIII.

"HE COMES!"—THE DREAD UNKNOWN!

An hour after Jubal Osgood arrived with the startling news of Joe Wiltz's death at the hands of the Unknown Marksman, fifty or more persons had assembled at the Five Points. Nearly half of Spencer's men were there—the rest of the crowd being composed of a few French Canadians from Bertraw's camp, and a few whites and Indians from Alleghan, who had come to witness the sports of the day.

But the foot-racing was entirely lost sight of in the excitement that prevailed over the death of Wiltz, and the presence of that unknown scourge so close to the Points.

Jubal Osgood, for the time being, became the chief center of attraction. He was importuned upon every side for a description of the dread enemy, and growing tired of describing him to every man, he finally mounted the horse-block in front of the inn and said:

"Gentlemen, you all seem desirous of knowing what the Unknown Marksman looks like, therefore I'll tell you all together. Wiltz and I war coming down the river road toward this place, conversin' 'bout the foot-race, and so forth. We war 'bout two miles from here when a rifle in the bushes before us rung out, and a cry burst from Wiltz's lips. I turned my head and saw him reel on his horse, and as he fell, I saw a little pink spot appear on his forehead where the bullet struck. Just then his horse skeered and bounded away, and seeing I could do poor Joe no good, I put spur to 'scape a similar death. I'd not ridden over fifty yards when a man with the smoke still curlin' from the muzzle of his gun, issued from the woods and stopped by the roadside. And such a man! One glance was enough. He was nine feet high if he was an inch, and seemed to be raising higher and higher like the head of a serpent. His beard was half as long as himself, and his eyes, I know, were as big as my fist, and glowed like balls of fire as they glared at me. I tell ye, boys, I never saw such a human being. I don't b'lieve he is a man, but some devilish monster that'll kill us all. This, gentlemen, is what I, Jubal Osgood, saw with my own eyes; and you know now what the Unknown Marksman is."

"Verily," said Gershom Bland, who had listened with ears and mouth open, "friend Osgood is a little excited, and peradventure his eyes have deceived him."

"Nothing but a monster could kill and slay innocent people," added Sandy Gray, laying considerable emphasis upon his words.

"Ah! this is a wicked, sinful world," sighed Obed, the Mennonite.

"Thee speaks truly, friend Obed," responded Gershom, "but with perseverance thee may sail through to the harbor of eternal peace. But then I must confess fears of this ungodly assassin, since he was seen upon my route to day."

"Men," shouted Spencer, "let us not stand idle here; surely fifty men are not afraid to face one! Let us divide up into about a dozen parties and beat the woods of Michigan through and through but what we get this lurking assassin. Not one of us will be safe so long as he is permitted to run at large. I am ready to sacrifice my life, if need be, in ridding the country of this unnatural monster. If there is a man here who refuses to join in the hunt, let him step out."

"Verily, friend Spencer," said Gershom, pushing his way through the crowd and confronting the captain, "thee knows my religious principles; but should the Unknown Marksman meet me on my route, perchance he would not respect a mail-carrier any more than a lumberman; nor hesitate to shoot a Friend any more than a sinner; therefore I will give thee the presence of my company, at least, in the search for the abominable creature; and peradventure will lay violent hands on the monster should it become necessary."

"That's the talk, Gershom!" answered Spencer; then turning to the crowd, he asked: "Does any one know whether Running Deer, the Chippewa, is here or not?"

He was answered by a voice in the affirmative, and the next moment the straight, lithe form of the Chippewa advanced through the crowd—moving with the cat-like grace and agility of the panther. In the hollow of his left arm he carried his double-barreled rifle; while under his right arm hung his mail-pouch. As he approached the captain, he fixed a look upon that worthy that caused him to fairly wince. Spencer never had any particular love for this intelligent and honorable young Indian, and his dislike had finally turned to fear. He believed he was as treacherous as he was subtle and cunning, yet he knew that he had no superior in all Michigan as a scout and hunter, and as their dread of the Unknown Marksman was a mutual one, he felt certain that the Indian would be worth a dozen common men on the enemy's trail.

"Running Deer," he said, addressing the young Indian, "if ever the skill of a good scout was required it is now; and to you we are all willing to concede that honor. Will you accept of the position of general scout in the great search we are about to make for the Unknown Marksman?"

"Running Deer is no coward; he is willing to do anything for his friends," replied the young mail-carrier, addressing his words to the crowd, as if he disdained speaking to Spencer.

"Then I would suggest," said the captain, assuming the right to speak as leader of the party, "that you go with Osgood to the point where the assassin was seen, and see which direction he took; with this information gained, men can be deployed through the woods to surround him. Meanwhile, a party had better go along and bring in poor Wiltz's body before the wolverines attack it."

With a grim, stoical smile Running Deer signified his willingness to begin the work assigned him, and, accompanied by Osgood, and four others with litters, he set off up the river.

In the meantime Captain Spencer began perfecting arrangements for a general search by dividing the crowd up into parties of four, and drafting a plan of operation.

While thus engaged Running Deer and his companions came hurrying back toward the Points, apparently in great excitement.

"Heavens!" exclaimed the captain. "I wonder what is wrong now?"

"Verily, fear has seized upon the minds of those brave men," observed Gershom, in a tone slightly sarcastic.

"I'll bet that's no ten men here that'll face that walkin' death-machine," exclaimed Sandy Gray.

"What brings you back?" exclaimed Spencer, as the men hurriedly approached.

Osgood placed his fingers to his lips, significant of silence. The man evinced great fear and excitement.

A dead silence settled over the three-score of men, while three-score of eager, frightened faces looked nervously around them.

Osgood, approaching the party, said, in a low, excited tone:

"He's comin' down the road!"

"Who's coming?" asked Spencer.

"The giant—the Unknown Marksman!"

A low cry of terror escaped every lip. A convulsive shudder passed over the assembly of armed, and hitherto boastful, men. Fear became plainly written upon nearly every face. And why?

A man was coming down the road. They

were soon to stand face to face with one of whom their very souls had become ingrained with fear. And this fear, engendered when each was alone, could not be dispelled now by the presence of superior numbers. Numerical power gave them no assurance of safety.

The scene was an interesting one: sixty men, apparently rooted with fear, stood still with fluttering hearts, white, quivering lips, and fixed eyes, watching for the coming of *a single man!*

Had the trumpet of the archangel heralded the coming of the Judgment Day the eyes of that band could not have been more closely fixed upon the East for the coming of the Son of Man.

Gershom Bland muttered something about the shedding of blood, and edged around to the rear of the crowd. His movements seemed to have created a sort of panic, for all the rest of the crowd became affected with a desire to fall back to the rear.

Every man felt as though he would be the especial victim of the dreaded foe.

A bird, fluttering up from the bushes by the roadside, was noticed by those three-score pairs of watchful eyes.

Three score pairs of listening ears imagined they could hear the massive tread of the approaching demon.

The top of the coon-skin cap was suddenly discovered above the tops of the bushes where the road made a bend. But no wearer was yet visible.

"He comes!" whispered Old Sandy, his teeth fairly chattering, and his eyes starting from their sockets.

"And, good heavens! he is tall as them bushes—even taller than O'good said—"

"There!" stammered Captain Spencer, with apparent terror; "look!—stand firm!—fall back!—heavens!" and the captain seemed on the verge of flight.

The object of their fears had at last appeared in sight. He was a tall, powerful man whom their fears had magnified into a giant of Titan proportions.

With a firm, massive step the dread Unknown advanced toward the startled, huddling crowd of men.

A silence reigned; but it was only the silence that precedes the fury of the storm.

CHAPTER XIV.

"CRUCIFY HIM! CRUCIFY HIM!"

The advancing giant was a man in the very prime and vigor of life; and could have been but little less than six feet and six inches in height. He was as straight as an Indian, and carried himself in that firm, decisive and graceful manner of the lion in his native jungle. His form was clad in a hunter's garb of yellow buckskin and velveteen highly ornamented—the whole fitting him so neatly as to display the contour of his broad hips, deep chest, wide shoulders and round, muscular neck. A long, brown beard reaching to his breast gave an additional look of wonderful power and strength to his general appearance; and all that could be conceived of the ferocity of a tiger the assembly at the Five Points mentally declared the giant stranger the possessor of. But as he came nearer more than one was astonished by the color and expression of his eyes. They were of a light blue with the meekness and innocence of a child.

To many the man's huge form would have dwindled away to that of a mere good-natured big boy in the light and expression of the wonderful eyes; but not so with the crowd of men gathered in front of the Free Pitch Inn. Their souls, or, at least, most of them, had been so long strangers to any of the nobler sentiments of the human heart, and their minds so steeped against the Unknown Marksman, that their inward fury could not be checked by any feeling of admiration for his fine physique, nor gentle, yet manly and innocent face.

The stranger was armed with a fine-looking rifle which he carried in the hollow of his arm. In his belt was a pair of large-sized revolvers and a sheathed hunting-knife.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," the stranger said, approaching the crowd, and addressing it in a clear, full tone, free from the terrors of a guilty conscience.

Captain Spencer made a half-choked response.

The big hunter appeared not a little surprised at the various faces fixed so curiously upon him, and the silence maintained by all.

"A pleasant day, gentlemen," he remarked, still advancing.

"Thee speaks the truth, stranger, though the fact is obvious to us all," answered Gershom Bland.

The crowd seemed to shrink from the approach of the stranger, who was not slow to note the fact.

He knew not the terrible interest centered in him, but regarded their stare as the vulgar curiosity of the motley crowd. But it was such a persistent and unflinching stare that the man became greatly embarrassed by it; and without further words, he passed on, and, enter-

ing the grocery, called for a pound of gunpowder.

"What for?" demanded Phil Strahl, the proprietor, his courage rallying; "to shoot down innocent people with?"

The giant's face flushed red, and these meek, mild eyes seemed to burn into the very soul of Phil Strahl, whose words appeared to have cut to the quick.

Phil's words, however, were heard at the door, and were followed by the flutter of feet, and the ominous murmur of excited voices.

"Kill him! shoot him! seize him!" shouted a voice outside, and then the crowd grew bolder.

"Crucify him! crucify him!" shouted Sandy Gray.

"Peace! peace, friends," admonished Gershom Bland; "let not thy hot heads lead thy hands into violence."

"What means this rabble?" asked the big stranger of Phil Strahl.

"It means that you are their victim."

"Why, sir, am I treated thus? Can not an inoffensive stranger enter your house without insult?"

"Ay, but you're not inoffensive, sir; your murderer of innocent men has been discovered. You are the Unknown Marksman!" replied Strahl.

The man, for the first time, evinced some uneasiness; though a faint, contemptuous smile wreathed his bearded lips.

"Gentlemen, if you really think so, all I ask is a fair hearing," he said, addressing those around him, "for I deny the charges preferred."

"He renders, and asks a fair trial," bellowed burly Phil Strahl, though every word cost him an effort.

"You murdered Joo Wiltz, confound you," yelled Osgood, growing bold enough to shake a pistol in the stranger's face; "you can't deny that, sir."

"Sir, I recognize you," replied the man; "you are the coward that deserted your dead comrade when shot down in the road by an unseen foe."

"Yes, and you are the foe that killed him," replied Osgood, stung to the quick by the man's words.

"Then this is why I am treated thus? That man has told you I slew his comrade," said the stranger. "It is false—every word of it. I heard the report of the rifle, and stepped to the roadside to see what it meant. Just then that man rode past me, wild with terror."

"A very probable story, gentlemen, when I see'd the smoke comin' out of the muzzle of his gun," said Osgood, decisively.

"You saw no such thing. I have not fired my gun to-day," was the stranger's bold contradiction. "The load is in that I put there this morning."

"Stranger," said Captain Spencer, assuming his usual air of authority, "for nearly a year some murderous wretch has been wandering through the woods of the Black rivers, amusing himself by shooting down our citizens, and suspicion has fixed upon you as being that Unknown Destroyer; therefore, we consider it our duty to arrest you upon the information of Jubal Osgood."

"I shall offer no resistance; all I ask is a fair, impartial hearing," replied the hunter.

"You shall have it," answered the captain.

The giant hunter was disarmed, and his rifle and other weapons closely examined. To the bitter regret of all, they found the former was a piece of heavy caliber; while his bullet-pouch and pockets disclosed nothing having the semblance of a copper ball, large or small. Still the infuriated crowd did not despair of proving the giant guilty of being the terrible foe; and so a court was at once convened.

Phil Strahl, who made some pretensions to legal lore, from the fact of his long in possession of a copy of the postal laws, donned the judicial ermine by the unanimous request of his friends, and took his seat under a tree in front of the inn, with all the formal dignity of a chief justice.

A jury of twelve men was impaneled without any of the usual formalities of selecting a jury.

Captain Spencer was appointed by the court to prosecute the case.

Several men were sent out after Wiltz's body, and to measure the ground and make a note of all the alleged particulars of the situation of the prisoner and the victim at the time of the death. Of course, Osgood led the party, and when they returned he was the first witness placed upon the stand.

Nothing new was deduced from his evidence. He swore substantially to what he declared from the horse-block. He would admit of no doubt in his mind as to the author of Wiltz's death. He even swore that the rifle taken from the giant was not the same that he held when he passed him on the road.

This caused no little commotion in the crowd, and a score of men were at once dispatched in search of the concealed rifle. Meanwhile, the trial went on. Obed, the Mennonite, made a statement as to the alleged position of the giant and his victim when Osgood saw him. He

also gave his views as to the murder, but they had little bearing on the case. He would swear to nothing, for the Mennonite faith opposed the taking of an oath.

With one or two other witnesses, the prosecution rested. The defendant had no evidence other than his own emphatic denial of the charges to offer; and even this was hooted at by the mob.

After a long address by Captain Spencer, the case was given to the jury.

A deep silence and painful uncertainty took possession of the crowd pending the deliberation of the jury. But it lasted only for a short time, when the jury returned with a verdict of "Guilty."

A grim smile of derision passed over the prisoner's face as the foreman announced the verdict.

A wild shout of triumph burst from three-score of powerful lungs.

At this juncture Jubal Osgood was seen to stagger and reel as though drunk. A friend at his side caught him. A little pink spot appeared upon his forehead from which drops of blood oozed and chased each other down his face.

"My God!" cried Spencer, "he has been slain—shot by the murderer whom we felt we had in our power! Did any one hear the report of a rifle?"

No one had, for the yells that rent the air at the time would have drowned the report of a cannon. The echoes were still rebounding through the woods.

"How often, oh, mercy," cried Judge Strahl, "have our shouts of joy got to turn to wails of sorrow?"

"Verily, I say unto thee," said Gershom Bland, "the wages of sin is death, and friend Osgood has been slain for bearing false witness against a brother. Perchance, it would be as well for thee to release the big stranger that he may help thee in thy search for the ungodly murderer. I now feel anxious that he be seized by violent hands since he lurks along the way I pursue."

Spencer at once acted upon the suggestion of the Quaker, and liberating the stranger, restored his arms and accoutrements to him. He endeavored to make an apology for the treatment he had been instrumental in giving the giant; and the latter accepting all very calmly, quietly replied:

"I am sorry that it has required such desperate evidence to convince you of my entire innocence. I have heard of this Unknown Marksman before I came into this vicinity; but always supposed it was a name applied to the Vigilance Committee of the lumber districts. My name is Goliah Strong, and at present I am serving as guide to three young men who follow the occupation of bee-hunters, and who are encamped near Spirit Rapids. I never did aught of which I am ashamed; but if this Unknown Marksman is not your vigilante, as I supposed he was, then there is some cause for his haunting you people like an avenging Nemesis. There is no human so depraved as to sequester the woods and shoot men down for the mere love of murder. There is something back of all this silent death-work. The Unknown Marksman, you will find yet, is an avenger; at least this is my opinion."

"Amen," was Gershom Bland's solemn endorsement of the big Lunter's words.

"Thee speaks like a Christian and philosopher, friend Strong," said Obed Smiley, with an uncouth acquiescence.

"Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord," said Sandy Gray, in a strange tone, intended to be solemn.

Goliah Strong, the giant hunter, was permitted to depart in peace; and soon after the Five Points were deserted by those who had assembled to take part in the races and sports of the day.

Some went in search of the Unknown Destroyer, and some went home. Gershom Bland, Sandy Gray and Running Deer, each departed for his respective settlement with the mail; and Phil Strahl now found himself alone with the terrified members of his Leuschild.

Outside all was now silent save the ominous creaking of the great sign-board, and the cold, still rustling of the pines like the robes of the dead.

CHAPTER XV.

A HEROIC GIRL'S FIGHT FOR LIFE.

AN August sun, almost sultry hot, shone from a clear sky, while not a breath of air was moving.

Silent and dreary lay the Blue Marsh in the heart of the great woods. Desolate and silent seemed the lonely hut of the old cranberry-picker; and yet the door stood ajar, and as the sun crossed the zenith, the old man and his pretty grandchild, Ida Zane, emerged from the hut, and walked slowly down the green slope to the creek, where lay two Indian canoes made of bark. Each of them carried a willow basket, for they were on their way to the marsh for whortleberries—this crop now being ripe.

Each one took a canoe, and after paddling down the stream some distance, Ida landed on one side and her grandfather on the other. The

former tied up her canoe, then turning, walked out into the low bushes that were laden with their dark, luscious berries, and began her labor. Her little singers darted here and there among the bushes with a dexterity that could only come of practice. Now and then she paused to eat a berry, or to glance around her to relieve her head of its dizziness, and her eyes of the blur superinduced by the excessive heat.

Not a breath of air stirred the bushes, nor passed over wood or swamp. Not a sound save the twitter of birds, that had come to feast on the purple berries, broke the stillness of the place.

Put busily pretty Ida Zane picked away. An hour or more had passed; her basket was half filled, when suddenly a faint sound, like a far-off human voice, fell upon her ears. She ceased her labor, and tipping her hat back upon her neck, she pressed her berry-stained finger to her lips, as if to invoke deeper silence around her. Thus she listened for some time; but she heard nothing, and all she could see was a few vultures, wheeling and circling in the air, over the woods to the south of the marsh. But this was a very common sight, and she thought nothing of it, until she again heard that sound so closely resembling a human voice. She continued listening now until she had heard it the third time, and as it came more distinct, she now became satisfied that it was a human voice—the voice of some one in distress; and she shuddered when she discovered that it came from the vicinity over which those vultures were hovering.

For a moment the maiden stood undecided as to the course she should pursue, for she felt satisfied some one was in distress. The thought of deception never entered her young mind, and her heart became touched with anxious sympathy for the author of those feeble cries. She looked for her grandfather, to ask his advice in the matter; but he was out of sight among the bushes, and so she concluded to lose no time in hunting him up, but placing her basket in her canoe she started for the woods fast as her little feet would carry her.

She ran on until nearly out of breath, when she stopped to listen, for the overshadowing tree-tops now concealed her guide—the buzzards—from view. She had not long to wait; plainly to her ears came that sad cry of distress. It filled her breast with fear and horror, and yet it drew her on and on, as if it were possessed of some terrible fascination.

As the little berry-picker advanced deeper and deeper into the woods, other sounds than those of human suffering became audible. They were the gibbering and snarling of wolverines and the shriek of vultures. With her heart in her throat, brave little Ida moved on—until a frightful, startling scene burst upon her view—a scene from which she recoiled in horror.

In the center of a little opening, on a bare, stony ridge, where the boiling sun beat down unobstructed, lay the form of a man. A great stone was at his back; in his hand he clutched a stick with which he defended himself from the wolverines that were snarling and skirmishing around him. His head was bare, and the hair all matted with gore. His face was streaked with blood, and wore a look of agony that could only have come of long suffering. His clothing was tattered and torn as if by the teeth of the wolverines; and, taken altogether, he was an object of the most haggard and wretched appearance Ida Zane had ever looked upon. And yet she saw that he was young—a mere boy in years.

Back of him lay the carcass of a deer, festering and blistering in the sun. It was the deer slain the day before by Randolph Spencer, and it was the putrid flesh of this animal that attracted the vultures and wolverines there; but when they came, they seemed more anxious to feast upon the living than the dead.

After she had taken in the sight, and had fully comprehended the situation, brave little Ida Zane advanced to the rescue of the suffering youth. She uttered a little cry that sent the cowardly wolverines scampering away into the woods, and the vultures into the air. Then she turned to the wounded boy; but before she could speak, he raised his eyes, and cried out:

"Oh, thank God! my prayers have been heard!"

"Oh, sir!" cried Ida, excitedly, "what is the matter? Are you wounded?"

"Wounded almost unto death, fair stranger!" he responded, lifting his bloodshot eyes to hers.

"Who are you, and where is your home? Can I help you?" Ida asked, bending over him like an angel of mercy, while tears of sympathy welled up into her eyes.

"My name is Darrall—Nathan Darrall."

"Darrall—Nathan Darrall," she repeated.

"I was wounded three nights ago," he continued, "by being thrown out of a boat and striking my head upon a stone in the water. How I escaped, I hardly know. I have a vague recollection of floating and floating for hours on the water; then of creeping away into the woods to elude some awful danger. I

must have been delirious, for I was very weak from loss of blood. Finally, a raging fever set in, and it seemed as though I would surely burn up. When this subsided, and full consciousness returned, hunger next seized upon me; but I was unable to walk, and so I crawled off through the woods—eating some berries and roots. At length I came to the carcass of the deer, where I feasted my hunger upon the tainted flesh; and here have I remained ever since—growing weaker instead of stronger. The hot sun pouring upon my head, and the wolverines together, will soon put an end to my suffering, and—"

"No, no, sir!" cried the maiden, in wild excitement; "they shall not come near you; besides, I can assist you to the shade. Then I will call grandpa; you shall not die."

"Do not excite yourself about me, fair girl," said the almost exhausted youth; "I cannot walk—my limbs are paralyzed. You cannot move me from here."

"Then give me that knife in your belt," she replied, and lifting the weapon from its sheath, she bounded away across the opening to the woods and soon came back with some bushes with which she erected a shade over the unfortunate young bee-hunter.

"God bless you, little woman," he said, gratefully, as the cool shade seemed to pervade his spirit with renewed strength; "will you tell me what your name is? and where you reside?"

"I live at the Blue Marsh with Daniel Berry; but my name is Ida Zane. Grandpa Berry is not very far from here, so I will run and bring him over, and together we can help you home."

"No, no; stay, Ida," he said, quickly; "you are nearly exhausted now, child; wait until you have been well rested."

"But you are suffering, Nathan Darrall," she replied, calling him by name with a childlike familiarity.

"I am feeling a great deal better now, I assure you. This shade eases my pain. Oh, the tortures of this day! The Lord only knows what I have suffered; and even yet, my eyes seem ready to burst out of my head. But I know I will get better."

Tears of pity welled up into the eyes of the little berry-picker. She took off her hat, and, with sisterly kindness, fanned the feverish face of the suffering youth. Ida Zane did not regard him as a more sophisticated girl would a stranger. She knew him only as a suffering fellow-being, to whom her young soul went out with all her woman's pity and sympathy—a sufferer in need of the tenderest assuagements of gentle hands.

The cool breeze that kissed Nattie's cheeks acted with the power of a soothing balm. It drove away much of the pain that the heat had produced; but at the same time he felt a strange drowsiness stealing over him. Heavy weights seemed pressing downward upon his eyelids, and objects became dim and visionary to his sight. He struggled hard to keep awake, and it required every effort of his will to overcome the reaction that was but the result of the alleviation of his suffering. His nervous system was giving way as the pain, that had kept it up, subsided; and he would soon have been sound asleep had he not suddenly been roused by a cry of excitement from Ida's lips.

The maiden had discovered that the wolverines were returning—reinforced—a dozen strong; while overhead the vultures were again wheeling and circling in the air.

She sprung up, and seizing a stout stick, stood ready to beat the animals off. She apprehended but little danger from them at first, for she supposed they were attracted there by the dead deer; but she knew it was all important to keep them from the carcass, for once there they would not hesitate to attack the wounded lad who lay so near. So she frightened them away, but they soon came back and set up a terrible wrangling and snarling. This brought others. One by one their force was gradually increased; and they grew bolder as their numbers grew stronger. They encircled the little glade, a hundred strong.

Ida Zane stood over the helpless youth, club in hand. She now became seriously alarmed for his safety, and this uneasiness increased as she saw the force of animals growing stronger and stronger. She knew they were naturally cowardly when in small force, but when in large numbers they were ferocious and deadly.

As the wolverines advanced closer and closer upon the tempting quarry, the vultures descended lower. They knew each other, for at many a forest banquet had they feasted together. They were companion ghouls.

Gradually the cowardly beasts contracted their circle by advancing and retreating—gaining a few inches at each advance, and using an almost human instinct in endeavoring to crowd some of their number forward upon the prostrate form of the young bee-hunter.

Bravely little Ida stood at her post, and plied her club upon the beasts that had come so close that she could now rap them over the head. Nathan's very soul became inspired by the wonderful courage of the maiden, and he en-

deavored to assist her. He grasped his stick and feebly raised it aloft. But, despite their united efforts, the wolverines crowded closer and closer.

At length a number of them reached the carcass of the deer, and, hungry and ravenous, they began tearing at the flesh, and fighting and tumbling around it, a seething mass of slaty forms. Others dashed on and joined at the feast and fight, and in endeavoring to drive them away, a huge old malo turned and seized Ida by the skirts of her dress; but a well-directed blow caused it to release its hold and retreat.

Not the half of the maddened, voracious beasts could get near the carcass of the deer, and at length those on the outside of the feasting horde turned and began crowding toward Nathan.

"Oh, my heavens, they will kill you!" Ida cried, in a tone of wild distress.

"Run, Ida, run, and save yourself!" the youth said; "never mind me; I am ready to die."

"Oh, Nathan! I can never leave you here alone to be torn to pieces by these fierce beasts," the brave girl exclaimed, and her hitherto mild soft eyes now blazed with a wild, desperate light.

As if endowed with superhuman power, she attacked the wolverines crowding upon Nattie. She beat them away a few paces, but they soon swarmed back; while she fought them upon one side they approached upon the other.

Never was there such an awful look stamped upon woman's face as that upon the face of heroic little Ida Zane. Not even the face of Rizpah of old, who defended her dead from the beast and vultures upon Mount Gibeah beneath the blazing heat of a Judean sky, could have worn a more terrific look of desperate resolve.

In the midst of her awful struggle, a cloud came over the maiden, and raising her eyes she beheld a huge buzzard settling so close over that she could see the blaze of its hungry eyes, the white wattles around its filthy beak, and the naked coral skin upon its repulsive neck. And still it was settling as if intending to bury its talons in her golden hair. Quick as a flash she raised her club and struck it. With a hissing scream it seemed to strike back at her with its somber wing, then it soared aloft and perched itself on the top of a great pine, still watching the scene below.

The numbers of the wolverines were still increasing rapidly, and it would be impossible for the brave little heroine to hold out much longer against them. She knew this, and lifting her voice, she cried to Heaven for help; and God, in His infinite mercy, heard her appeals and sent her assistance. In the midst of her struggle, when all the reserved force of nature had been summoned to a final effort, a loud voice rang out above the jowering of the animals, and a man, followed by a number of dogs, bounded into the opening and attacked the screeching beasts.

It was Old Wolverine!

"Witches and warlocks!" yelled the old hunter; "an angel in the midst of demons—go in, Baltic! sick 'em, Mellow Tongue! Hurraw thar, pups! chaw 'em fine—wool 'em—that's it, Baltic! Send 'em over the hills' every grab, old dog! Ha! ha! ha! girl, arn't that julectly lively now? Splendid scenery, arn't it?"

The "scenery" to which the old woodman referred was the desperate conflict between his dogs and the wolverines. The latter, loth to give up their feast, made a fierce battle for it, and would doubtless have come out victorious had Old Wolverine not seized a club and dashed in among them; and after training more than a dozen, put the rest to flight and sent the dogs in pursuit.

"By the witches of Salem!" the old hunter exclaimed, when the battle had ended, and he had turned to address the maiden, "the girl is stone dead!"

He saw the form of the girl lying unconscious upon the earth. The reaction following her rescue had been too sudden for her delicate nerves, and she sunk down in a dead faint.

"She has fainted, Wolverine," said a voice at the old man's side; and turning, he saw for the first time the form of a man lying under some leafy boughs.

With wildly-staring eyes the old man gazed in upon him, for, though he recognized the voice, he did not the face.

"Don't you recognize me, Wolverine?"

"Oh, great Immanuel!" cried the hunter; "it is Nattie Darrall! By golly-ation, boy, we thought you'd gone over the hills—war drowned o'ther night, as we couldn't find you high or low."

"I have been nearer dead than alive since that night; but, Wolverine, look after that girl. God never made a more heroic young soul. For one hour has she stood over me and fought those wolverines."

"Four 'llies' received," said the hunter, mopping the perspiration from his brow with his sleeve: "a good fier, I've written 'll do for good," and he advanced, and leaning by the maiden's side, raised her head.

"Ho, friend Wolverine! you have your hands full!" a voice suddenly exclaimed.

Wolverine looked up and saw a tall figure enter the glade. It was Goliah Strong.

"Ah, it is you, Goliah!" cried Nattie—"our big-hearted guide of several days ago."

"Nattie, my boy!" exclaimed the giant hunter, "I am rejoiced to see you alive. Your friends are mourning you as lost!"

"Then they escaped that night?"

"Yes; but they are several miles from here now, but—" and he turned to Wolverine, "old man, what is the trouble there?"

"A gal, Goliah, a gal—sweet as my rosebud the sun ever warmed into life. That's what I've got, Goliah."

The giant hunter advanced to Wolverine's side, and, stooping, he gazed down into the face of the still half-unconscious girl. An exclamation burst from his lips, and he started back with surprise written upon his bearded face.

"Do you know her, Goliah?" asked Wolverine, noting the man's emotions.

"No," responded the hunter.

"Well, arn't she a nice one, though? Jews and Gentiles! you'd cut to 'a' see'd her fightin' wolverines away from the boy thar. But see here, Goliah, I b'lieve you know her—leastwise, you are terrible worked up. Does the party like o' a woman alers effect you that a-way? I know it does some men—queer 'bout it, too."

"Wolverine, do you know that girl?"

"Never set peepers onto her before; but she's comin' to—just wait and she'll soon be able to speak for herself."

Ida soon recovered full consciousness; and when able to speak, the sound of her voice seemed to increase Goliah Strong's emotions more than ever.

The maiden was greatly rejoiced when she learned that Nattie had been saved from the beasts and vultures. She at once suggested that he be removed to her home for care and treatment. She would listen to no refusal from Nattie; but in her childlike and impulsive way insisted on his becoming their guest at Blue Marsh until he was able to go upon his way. As there was really no alternative, the youth consented, though not against his will by any means, to be removed to Old Cranberry's cabin.

Goliah Strong and Old Wolverine carried him down to the creek; and then, while they rested upon the bank, Ida ran on after her canoe further up the stream.

While waiting her coming with the boat in which to carry the youth up to the cabin, Old Wolverine went back to the glade to secure the scalps of the dead wolverines, upon which there was a bounty.

When alone with Nattie, Goliah Strong said:

"Nattie, I am not going up to that cabin."

"Not going? Why not, Goliah?"

"My reason is a very vague one."

"I noticed, Goliah, that you were agitated by Ida's face," Nattie confessed.

"It was a wonderful pretty face—a face that would agitate the heart of any man, or boy either, I observe; but, Nattie, I have a request to make of you, and that is, that you note carefully everything about the home of the old cranberry picker. Find out the number in his family, their names, if you can without being impudent, their former residence, and so forth. Will you promise me this, Nattie?"

"I will, Goliah," said Nattie, as a faint light began to dawn upon his mind.

"You will probably be able to be out in a few days, and one week from to-morrow morning I will call here at this point—perhaps with the other boys—to confer with you."

"All right, Goliah; I will meet you," replied the young bee-hunter; "for I'm getting interested in you—I think I can see a little further than I could. I don't believe you are really what you appear to be—a hunter. I have wondered a great many times since we first met why you inquired so particularly into my family record; and the boys wondered, too. We finally came to the conclusion that you were—"

"The Unknown Marksman?"

"No, no; but a—"

"I have been arrested and found guilty of being that destroyer since I last saw you," again interrupted the hunter, "but I was released upon evidence of the unknown himself. Ah! here comes the maiden."

In a few moments she touched the shore at the hunter's feet, when Nattie was placed in the canoe in an easy, reclining position. There was no room for any other than the maiden and youth in the canoe, even had it been the desire of either of the hunters to accompany them; so, after a few kind, parting words, Ida dipped her paddle and the little bark glided away up the stream.

Goliah Strong leaned upon his rifle and gazed after the receding boat with a strange, thoughtful expression upon his face. He seemed to have forgotten his existence until aroused from his reverie by Old Wolverine, who came swinging down the hill, with his dogs at his heels, whistling—"Over the hills and far away."

"Why, Goliah, are they gone?" he asked, as he approached the hunter.

"Yes; the boat would carry no more; besides, I had no desire to go over there; for, Wolverine, that secluded hut"—and the big hunter pointed away toward the cabin of the old berry-picker with a wild, tragic look—"I solemnly believe holds a secret—a secret which the silence of past years has kept as still as though locked in the tomb of the dead!"

"Whew!" whistled Old Wolverine, in surprise.

"One by one," the quiet hunter continued, as if speaking to himself, "the clouds are beginning to break away. Who knows what the future may reveal?"

Several minutes of silence ensued; then the two men turned and, without a word, entered the dark, green woods.

CHAPTER XVI.

SHADOWING A NIGHT-WALKER.

OLD WOLVERINE and Goliah Strong bent their footsteps in the direction of Camp Spencer after turning their backs upon the Blue Marsh; and after a couple hours' brisk walking came within the sound of the lumbermen's axes. The crash of falling trees directed their course, and keeping clear of the workmen they passed around toward the camp. It was not their intention to go to the houses; but Goliah had expressed a desire to examine the location of the camp and its surroundings without himself being seen.

East of the camp every tree, except one, had been cut down and taken away. This one was a tall, majestic pine around whose base grew a clump of dense undergrowth. On the edge of this clearing Old Wolverine and Goliah halted. The latter ran his keen eye over the clearing, noting everything closely. Presently he fixed his gaze upon the solitary pine and remarked:

"It's rather singular they didn't fall that tree."

"Reckon they left that out of respect for the majesty of its fallen companions," observed Wolverine.

"I hardly think Captain Spencer has that much veneration for the grandeur of these woods. I think it must have been left for some other purpose; it may be hollow."

"Never, Goliah; you can't fool me on that. I've been in the woods too long not to be able to know a holler tree by its external appearance far as I can see it. No, sir; I'll go you a ducat that it's as sound to the very heart as any tree in Michigan."

"Well, that may all be; but I have a way of clutching at straws, instinctively, that most always helps me out of the rapids. Now, I want to look a little closer at that tree the first opportunity I have; and that will be soon, for the shadows of evening are already gathering."

The two men waited in the woods until darkness set in, and were about to approach the lone tree when they saw a light coming from the camp directly toward them. Crouching low they watched the moving light. They soon discovered it was a lantern in the hands of a man, who, passing near them went on into the forest.

"That feller's Cap. Spencer, sure'n thunder."

"Let us follow him; it may be a clew."

"Easy then, Goliah," and the two glided from their covert and crept softly away after the light.

Down through the deep woods they followed on with the dogged patience of Indian warriors. At length the sharp barking of a dog caused the light to stop. A man's voice was heard to call out from the darkness beyond, to which he of the lantern answered:

"Randolph Spencer."

"All right; come ahead, captain," was the reply.

"Ah!" exclaimed Old Wolverine. "I know where we are now; that's the Shingle-Weavers' camp."

"Indeed? Well, now would be a good time to advance while the dog is barking at Spencer. Wait here, Wolverine, till I come back."

As the light they had been following disappeared in the Shingle-Maker's hut, the big hunter stole softly forward. The dog continued to bark, but no voice challenged the hunter.

Half an hour passed when the light again appeared, and moved away in the direction it had come. Before it was out of sight Goliah Strong was at Wolverine's side.

"Come, Old Wolverine," he said, in apparent delight; "let's foller the light back. This night's work will not be for nothing."

Again they glided away upon the trail of the unsuspecting man. For two hours longer they followed him.

At length they reached the edge of the clearing. Here the light was put out, much to Goliah's regret. But the moon was shining, and to the happy surprise of the two hunters they saw their man turn to the right and disappear in the thicket surrounding that solitary pine.

"Wolverine, what did I tell you, old boy, about

that tree? I'll bet you it plays an important part in the drama of life," said Goliah, rubbing his hands with glee. "But then I'll examine it another time—when I am ready; and now, friend Wolverine, I am ready to follow you."

"Then let us strike for camp on the Black river. I want a little nap before we strike out for the Five Points to assist in organizing a grand hunt for the Unknown Marksman. I'm interested in that matter, Goliah, for I don't know what minute that bloodthirsty wretch may send a bullet through my head."

So saying, they turned and hurried away toward the river; and about midnight reached the camp, or bivouac, occupied by Frank Ballard and Ed Mathews.

"Nattie lives, boys!" shouted Old Wolverine, as they approached the camp-fire by which the two young bee-hunters sat mourning the loss of their young friend, and talking over the new sorrow it would be to his mother.

"Wolverine," exclaimed Frank, rising to his feet, half in doubt as to the truth of the old hunter's words, "do you tell this for a fact?"

"It is true, boys," affirmed their guide, Goliah Strong; "I have seen him and talked with him."

Frank and Ed sprung up and sent their shouts of joy through the woods upon the midnight stillness.

"That is the happiest news I ever heard," said Ed; "sit down, Goliah, and tell us where brave, kind, rollicking Nattie Darrall is."

The hunters seated themselves, when Goliah narrated Nattie's adventures, as told by himself, from the time they were thrown out of the boat into the river up to the time of his rescue in the forest glade from the wolverines.

"It was a narrow escape for him," said Frank. "We were just saying that if he was dead, the news would kill his poor widowed mother."

"Speaking of his widowed mother," said Goliah Strong, "reminds me of a question I want to ask you, boys: how long have you known Nattie Darrall?"

"I have known him ever since a babe. We lived next-door neighbors to the Darralls," replied Frank Ballard, somewhat surprised by the interest manifested by Goliah in Nattie.

"What kind of people were the Darralls?" the big hunter continued.

"Very fine people; Mr. Darrall and his wife were highly respected."

"What was their financial condition—say five or six years ago?"

"They were in good circumstances, financially. I think Mr. Darrall was worth about fifty thousand dollars at one time."

"At one time; then the widow is poor now?"

"Yes; very poor."

"How did they lose their property?"

"Through some carelessness on the part of Mr. Darrall, and rascality on the part of others."

"Do you know the circumstances by which it was lost, Frank?" the hunter asked.

"Yes," responded Ballard; "in the first place, Mr. Darrall's health became rather delicate, and as he was unable to oversee the management of his large landed possessions, he concluded to sell them and place the money on interest with real estate security. And no sooner had he effected the sale than two men, Captain Randolph Spencer, of lumber region fame, and one James Trimble, called upon him to negotiate a loan of fifty thousand dollars. They offered a vast tract of timber land worth four times the amount as security, and so they had no trouble in making the loan. The mortgage and notes were drawn up and acknowledged by the village justice, and forty-five thousand dollars paid to Trimble & Spencer. Five thousand more was to be paid in one week. The next day Mr. Darrall was to go to O—, the county seat of O— county, to have the notes and mortgage placed upon record; but that night the papers all disappeared from the drawer in which Mr. Darrall had placed them. A burglar had got into the house and carried them off! A close search was made for the thief, and a reward offered for the return of the papers, but they came not. Mr. Darrall was now in a great strait; and, to add to his difficulty, the man who owed him a balance on his farm failed, and not a dollar left. He had lost all but the amount paid Spencer and Trimble, forty-five thousand dollars. As fifty thousand was the amount promised them, he was unable to make good the remaining five thousand. However, he called upon Messrs. Spencer and Trimble and offered to make them a release to the lost mortgage and place it upon the record of the court, in consideration of which they were to execute a new mortgage to cover the forty-five thousand dollars already received. This Spencer and Trimble refused to do, unless he would pay the full amount promised; they knew he could not pay a dollar more than he had, and made this an excuse to cheat him out of the forty-five thousand dollars which they had already received."

"The infernal whelps!" exclaimed Old Wolverine, springing to his feet and cracking his fist in the palm of his hand. "I'd like to draw and quarter them both! I know Trimble, and I know Spencer."

"Well, did Darrall ever make any attempt to recover his money of Spencer and Trimble?" asked Goliah.

"Yes; a suit was begun in probate court, but before the sitting of the term Mr. Darrall died. The widow made no appearance in court, for she preferred keeping the few hundred dollars remaining for herself and boy to giving it to the lawyers; and so the suit was dismissed, and poor Mrs. Darrall and her boy, Nattie, were paupers. Neither Trimble nor Spencer have ever been the men to give her a dollar of the forty-five thousand justly due her."

"Rascals!" exclaimed Goliah Strong, rising to his feet, and pacing to and fro before the fire, his eyes flashing with some inward emotion. Presently he said:

"Frank, don't you think that money can be recovered yet?"

"If those notes and mortgages could be found, it would be no trouble; but my opinion is they are not in existence."

"You think they are not in existence, do you?" asked Strong, stopping short and fixing a strange look upon him.

"I think they are not," answered Frank, startled by the big hunter's actions.

"What reason have you for thinking so, Frank?" Strong continued.

"I don't know what reason I have for my opinion, more than—"

"Well, did it ever occur to your mind who were the thieves that stole those papers?"

"Suspicion was fixed upon Claude Turner; but nothing was ever proven against him."

"Did it never occur to you that these men, Trimble and Spencer, were instrumental in stealing these papers from Mr. Darrall, to prevent him getting them upon the records of the court?"

"It never did, Goliah."

"Well, sir, men that are mean enough to see a woman suffer, as you say Mrs. Darrall does, would not have been too good to steal the papers. With the money, or most of it, already in their hands, dishonorable men would have called it a clear gain could they destroy all written evidence of it having been borrowed before that evidence went to record. I believe there is some secret about this affair that the Darralls and their friends never mistrusted. I may look into it, by-and-by; but let us drop the subject for to-night. We all need rest, and if we go down to the Five Points to-morrow, to aid those folks in their arrangements for a search for the Unknown Marksman, we want to feel fresh and vigorous. So, boys, suppose we all turn in."

"'Nuff said," replied Old Wolverine, stretching himself along the earth, and pillowing his head upon Baltic's form; "boys, if you want a pillow, jist help yerself among my dogs thar."

Although the old hunter's friends did not avail themselves of his offer, they stretched themselves along the earth, and were soon sound asleep.

By daylight the party were astir and breakfasting early, they set out for the Five Points, to be present at the meeting called there for the coming night.

The party journeyed along leisurely, and it was not until about dusk that the Points were reached. They at once repaired to general head-quarters, the Free Pitch Inn, where they found a number of men had already assembled. Some of them were from Camp Spencer, some from Alleghan, some from Barkopolis, and a few from South Haven. Most of the latter, however, were notorious gamblers and black-legs, who made it a point to come up to the Free Pitch Inn about once a month to have a general good time where there were no legal limitations, as well as to fleece the lumbermen out of some of their hard-earned wages at the gambling-table.

The leader of this South Haven party we have met before. It was the notorious James Trimble; and with this man had Captain Randolph Spencer been closeted all day. No one thought anything of it, in particular, as they were partners in the possession of a large tract of timberland, and all supposed they were talking over their business matters. But in this the people were mistaken; they were discussing the events of that memorable night on the raft when some unknown hand snatched that important document, purporting to tell where the stolen Darrall notes and mortgage were concealed, from their hands; and their suspicion was, at length, fastened upon Old Wolverine as not only being the impudent thief, but the Unknown Marksman also!

So the two plotted a kind of a conspiracy against the old borderman. Knowing his fondness for whisky, they determined to get him drunk that night, and while under the influence of liquor, get him aside and search his person for the paper, and endeavor to "pump" him for information.

Wolverine mistrusted something of the kind as soon as he had seen how attentive Spencer and Trimble were to him; and finally, getting Goliah, Frank and Ed aside, he said:

"Thar's goin' to be some fun here to-night, boys; keep yer eyes open, for I shouldn't wonder if somebody didn't go over the hills."

"I see there is blood in those South Havenites' eyes," Goliah remarked.

"Whisky's puttin' it thar, tho'," replied Wolverine.

After supper was over the crowd all repaired to the bar-room where a number of tables had been arranged for cards. Phil Strahl, the proprietor, had concluded not to lose the chance of a few dimes while the crowd was gathering, even if the object of the meeting was for a more serious purpose.

Spencer and Trimble sat down by a table in one corner and invited Old Wolverine to occupy a chair with them. The old hunter accepted, and as he took his chair he tucked his long whiskers in the bosom of his hunting-shirt, and adjusted his heavy mustache preparatory to work.

Goliah Strong, Frank Ballard and Ed Mathews took seats in an opposite corner where they could watch what was going on over the room.

Playing at once commenced at Spencer's table. At first small amounts were bet; this was to test Wolverine's financial strength. At the end of every game drinks were ordered. Old Wolverine drank every time—smacking his lips with infinite gusto; and it was not long before he became somewhat loud and boisterous. He lost nearly every game. He swore like those around him, and to his friends it seemed as though he had lost all sense of border honor and manliness.

Old Goliah Strong watched him from under his hat-brim with a strange, eager smile upon his face that Ed and Frank did not fail to detect.

Frank and Ed were completely shocked by the rudeness and wickedness manifested by the crowd. Clinking glasses and shuffling cards blended with fierce oaths and ribald jests. It was a scene new to the bee-hunters; and they were greatly surprised by it. They supposed they were coming to an orderly meeting convened for a serious purpose.

Suddenly Phil Strahl, from the bar, exclaimed:

"As soon as the people are all in, the house'll be called to order. Bear this in mind, all of you."

"This, Ed," said Frank, in a low tone, to his companion, "is life in the lumber region. I wish Nattie could be here to see it; not that there is anything about it to be admired."

"It is perfectly shocking, Frank," replied Ed; "but, hark! What's Wolverine saying?"

"These are consolidated wolverine skulps," they heard the hunter remark, as he flourished a number of bank-bills above his head; "they completes (hic) my pile, boys, and I'm goin' to buck the hull o' them even if they all do go—

"Over the hills and far away,
Over the (hic-ills) and far away,
Over—

Put up fifty on that, will ye, cap'n?—you, too, James Mad'son Trimble (hic)."

The captain and Trimble covered the old hunter's pile and the game began. Great interest now became manifested, for these were large stakes for the Five Points. Several men gathered around the players; and all could not help noticing the terrible eagerness marked upon Old Wolverine's face as the game progressed.

A deep silence fell upon the house, but it was at length broken by a voice shouting out that Old Wolverine had lost. A deeper silence than ever followed this announcement, however, that was broken only by the soft, melodious strains of the old hunter whistling, "Over the hills."

Gradually, however, the buzz of voices, the clink of glasses and the shuffling of cards were resounded throughout the room.

Old Wolverine rose from his seat, and glancing about the room with a drunken stare, looked up his friends and then staggered over to where they sat.

"I'm dead broke, boys; say, can't—hic—you furnish me a few spuds, G'liar?"

"Wolverine," replied the big hunter, in a low, kind tone, "hav'n't you been playing and drinking too much?"

"S that any of your b'isness, G'liar? Say, tell me that—hic—won't you?"

A roar of laughter burst from the lips of those who heard the old man's drunken response.

"I don't want to see you make a beast of yourself, Wolverine," the big hunter continued, unmoved.

"Then le' me have some sand—clear broke—bu'sted—mus' win—hic—then I'll pay ye back, by guminey, I will; come, now, shell—hic—out, ole squipeepus."

"It's no use arguing with a drunken man," said Goliah to the boys, as he took a roll of money from an inner pocket.

"Not a bit," affirmed Wolverine, with a comical smile, as he endeavored, in vain, to stand quiet.

The giant hunter gave Old Wolverine two bills of a rather large denomination for a hunter to carry, and as the latter turned away, he said, in a low tone:

"G'liar—hic—if wuss comes to wuss, see that my dogs git in to help me."

The confusion in the room prevented others than his friends hearing; and as he staggered back to the table where Spencer and Trimble sat talking, in low tones, he exclaimed:

"Here's another fifty, boys—kiver it or fight, for I mean to win sumthin' for my ole woman. You know—hic—the Arab promises 'is wife a dowry out o' what—hic—he can steal from the sultan's caravan when—hic—goin' to Mecca. Now, that's me f'r all the world—hic. What I win at cards, I take to the ole woman; that's her dowry—fact. That's me. Old Wolverine, over and over—the hills and fur away."

Spencer covered the hunter's fifty dollars, and won it. All noticed that this less affected the old man seriously, for he drank two glasses of liquor; and then pulling out another fifty-dollar bank bill and a revolver, said, in a grave, husky voice:

"Here's the last ante I've got; but I'll put it up, and dare any man to cover it. If I lose, I'll never lose again. I mean business, now, if I never meant it before. If I lose that pile, my life goes with it! Do you hear?"

He fairly screamed the last words, and the look that settled upon his face never before set upon the face of a gambler in his last moments of despair and hopeless suspense.

Trimble coolly covered the desperate man's pile, and a deadly hush fell upon the house as the cards began to shuffle. The look upon Wolverine's face, the cold, terrible light in his eyes, and the revolver at his side, were sufficient to have awed a more desperate set of men.

Many of them were anxious to see the old hunter lose, for they believed he would end his own life. Spencer was one of them. He not only feared the man, but believed a certain secret would perish with him—the secret of the Darrall papers. But to both those that feared the old man and those that loved him, there came a moment of awful suspense and silent agony.

One or two rose from their seats and started toward the table; but Old Wolverine took up his revolver and said:

"Set down, every bishunt of ye; if another man dares to move, I'll kill him!"

All sunk into their seats, half-choking with fear and suspense.

Goliah Strong still sat by Ed and Frank, regarding the gamblers with a strange smile upon his bearded face.

The game went on. It was that old-time game—old sledge, the favorite game of the lumbermen.

Every neck in the house was craned to its utmost, every eye turned toward the corner, and every ear on the alert for the final result.

At length Trimble took the cards to deal. Each stood six points, with the deal in favor of Trimble. Spencer announced the run of the game, and when it became known that the whole result hung upon the next hand, the suspense of the spectators became awful. Each man's heart seemed to rise into his throat and beat with great, pulsing throbs.

Trimble dealt the cards slowly, carefully, for he, too, had become deeply imbued with the suspense of the moment; and yet he would not have sacrificed a point to save the hunter's life. In fact he exerted all his wonderful skill in dealing the cards that he might be enabled to furnish the spectators with a tragedy such as the Five Points had never enjoyed. He knew Wolverine was in earnest. He had seen more than one man, driven to desperation by whisky and repeated losses at the gambling-table, end all in the destruction of his own life. He could see that deadly resolve settled firm in the old hunter's eye, and in the wild, suicidal expression of the face.

Old Wolverine cut the cards with a nervous hand, then Trimble ran them off six apiece, and turned the trump.

It was the jack of clubs!

Trimble had won the game!

The announcement fell like a death-knell upon the ears of the audience.

A sound like the far-off muttering of a storm passed over the house.

Old Wolverine took up his revolver, cocked it, then rising to his feet, placed the muzzle to his head, and—coolly scratched his ear with the weapon; at the same time he thrust a long index finger out toward Goliah Strong, and with a comical leer, exclaimed:

"Go-liar Strong, loan me another ante, won't you—hic—say, won't you?"

"Sold!" exclaimed Sandy Gray, the mail-carrier, who had come in a few minutes previous.

A roar of laughter burst from the lips of some of the audience, while muttered oaths, evidence of disappointment, fell from the lips of others.

CHAPTER XVII.

WOLVERINE GROWS MORE RECKLESS.

"GO LLAR," repeated Old Wolverine, with emphasis, removing his revolver from his head, and pointing it at Goliah Strong, "do you hear me? Loan me another ante or over the hills you go!"

Goliah Strong arose, and advancing across the floor, placed another bank bill of one hundred dollars denomination in Wolverine's hand, saying:

"That's the last dollar I have in the world."

"You shall soon have her back, G'liar; never mind—hic—ole feller," replied Wolverine. Then, turning to Spencer, he continued: "Now, cap'n, if you want to kiver that bill, do so; if not, forever hold your peace."

The captain took the bill and looked it over carefully, as though he mistrusted it of being a counterfeit; and when satisfied of its genuineness, he took ten bills, aggregating a hundred dollars, from his pocket, and covered the old hunter's ante.

Then the playing was resumed. Old Wolverine seemed drunker than ever, and handled the cards as though his bony fingers were stiff; but, contrary to the expectation of many, he won the game. A second game was played, and he again came out victorious, five points ahead. A third would have been played had the landlord not called out:

"Gentlemen, you'll now put up your cards and come to order. The people roundabouts have all gathered in, and we don't want to neglect the great object for which we have met. Now then, if any of you feel like it, just step up to the bar and drink at my expense; then we'll go to business."

There were very few in the house but what "felt like it," and so there was a general rush to the bar, attended with no little confusion. Goliah Strong, taking advantage of the occasion, walked over to where Wolverine sat in a sort of a drunken stupor, and said:

"Wolverine, you're gettin' pretty drunk."

"Am, am I? Well, mebby—hic—you know. Here, Goliar, 's yer money I bor'ed—twenty bills, all on the *Farmers' and Mechanics' Bank of Marion, Ohio.*"

"Thanks!" said Goliah, in a whisper, and he went back to his seat.

The crowd soon, though reluctantly, melted away from the bar, when the house was again called to order by the landlord. Captain Spencer was then selected to preside over the meeting, and in taking the chair, said:

"Gentlemen, I thank you for this honor, and hope I may have your earnest support in the great matter before the house. For a year or more, as you all very well, and very sadly know, some man, or some monst'r I shou'd have said, has been skulking along our rivers, our highways, and around our own homes, shooting down our citizens without cause or provocation; and—"

"Hic," suddenly burst from Old Wolverine, so loud that it sounded above the voice of the speaker—causing a subdued laugh throughout the room. The old hunter, in his attempt to appear orderly, had assumed a position both ludicrous and reposing. With his legs stretched out before him, his head thrown back, mouth open, and eyes half closed, he appeared the very picture of drunken stupidity.

"The name of the Unknown Marksman," continued the chairman, after order had been restored, "has become a terror in these regions, and it is time it was abated. We have been too excited at times—as we were the day we arrested Goliah Strong—and too careless and negligent as soon as the excitement of the moment wears off. But now we have met, and let cool judgment prevail. Let us organize and hunt the demon down as we would a deadly ferocious beast, or—"

"Hic!" Old Wolverine again put in his drunken period, to the amusement of some of the lumbermen.

"I would suggest," Spencer went on, "that we divide up into parties of from four to five, according to our experience as hunters, scatter out over the country in some system of order, surround the upper timber, and then close in the circle upon the game."

"That's it, cap'n," broke in Old Wolverine; "have a grand circle dance of't—demon in the center, and all hands around—root-a-tooty-toot, tee-toot-tee toot," and the old man began patting his foot and singing a lively air.

"Order!" thundered the chairman; "if you don't keep quiet, Wolverine, you'll have to be removed from the house."

"Hic," from the old hunter.

The captain continued his remarks, and finally concluded by suggesting an order of business for the meeting. His suggestions were unanimously adopted, for all had great faith in Captain Spencer's ability to command and execute.

The first thing done was to appoint the captain leader of all the forces to be sent against the enemy. This done, he divided the crowd up into parties of four and five. Goliah Strong, Ed Mathews and Frank Ballard were placed along with two of Spencer's lumbermen—very pleasant and quiet sort of men; while Old Wolverine was reserved as a kind of scout, though his friends saw that he was spoken of with evident mistrust by Spencer and Trimble.

The old wolf-hunter was asleep when his part was assigned to him, and so he was awakened to know if he would accept of the duty. The old fellow started up, rubbed his eyes and

glared around him in a sort of a bewilderment, muttering:

"Darned dark'n here; why don't some one snuff the candle!—I'll do it—stand back thar, Spenc'r," and drawing his revolver, he swung it recklessly round his head, then brought it to a level on the candle burning at Captain Spencer's side. An involuntary exclamation burst from a score of lips, and was followed by the "ping" of the old hunter's revolver. The candle flickered as though struck by a current of air, then it flared up with a broader blaze and clearer light, for the bullet, true to its aim, had cut off the end of the black, charred wick as completely as though it had been done with a pair of snuffers.

Every man was startled, and many enraged, by this foolhardy trick of the old hunter; strong and loud were the threats made against him by the lumbermen and others; but, in the midst of their excitement, James Trimble drew attention to another object.

On the wall beyond the lamp, and behind Captain Spencer, hung the faded portrait of some old military hero; and in the very center of the forehead of this picture had the old hunter's bullet passed—burying itself in the log behind.

The discovery created some excitement, and the name of the Unknown Marksman was whispered about the room.

"Wolverine," said Spencer to Trimble, "is just drunk enough to expose the secret that involves the Unknown Marksman in mystery. You see the hole is that portrait is small, and the shot was the best I ever saw. Where's the drunken man that can snuff a candle across this room as he did? I tell you, Trimble, there is a wonderful coincidence, or meaning in his bullet striking that portrait as it did."

"You really believe, then, that he is the Unknown Destroyer?"

"What did I tell you before getting him drunk? But look here; you keep your eye on him, and I'll dig the bullet out of the wall. If it is a copper bullet, then I will know, beyond a single doubt, that he is the Destroyer."

Turning, the captain took up a large cheese-knife, and began digging into the pine log after the telltale bullet. Many saw what he was doing, and suspected its object—awaiting the result with great anxiety and suspense.

The captain worked away, boring, browing, and chipping the wood along the track of the bullet, until the missile was finally reached.

"What is it?" asked Trimble, as the bullet finally rolled to the floor.

As if in answer to his question, a rifle on the outside of the building, and near the open door, rung out, and Trimble, clutching at his brow, staggered and almost fell.

"My God!" he exclaimed, "some devil has shot me! Captain, I am done for."

A long red line, from which the blood was trickling down his face, told where the assassin's bullet had plowed its way across the man's forehead.

The wildest excitement prevailed over this attempted assassination of Trimble, and when the bullet, which had come so near being fatal, had been removed from the wall and found to be a copper bullet, every body became almost frantic with vengeance and fear.

No time was there now to be lost trifling with Old Wolverine, for it had been settled satisfactorily in Spencer's mind that the old hunter was entirely innocent of the crimes of the Unknown Marksman. In a very few minutes every man, well-armed, set out upon the great hunt for the destroyer. Not every man either; there were four excused from the hunt on account of their being United States officials. These were Phil Strahl, postmaster, and the three mail-carriers, Sandy Gray, Gershom Bland and Running Deer.

By midnight the Five Points were deserted. Old Wolverine had resolved to act as an independent scout, and upon leaving his friends, Strong, Ballard and Mathews, he said:

"I tell ye what, boys, it come mighty nigh gittin' hot in thar; if it hadn't been fur the holes in the toes of my boots, I'd had to gone out and empty the whisky outen my boots a time or two."

"How come whisky in your boots?" asked Frank.

"Why, Lord bless ye, boy, do you think I drunk all that liquor? No sir-ee, hoss-fly! I tucked my beard in my shirt-bosom, and then poured the liquor thro' the beard down outside o' my neck. You'll never catch Old Wolverine drinkin' in sich a place as that—not by a jugful! But, boys, I'm goin' right up the river; and just as soon as you sellers can git away from the rest, come on and I'll wait for you opposite the mouth of the North Black river."

"All right, Wolverine," replied Goliah, and the old wolf-hunter took his departure.

An hour after they had left the Points, Goliah Strong, Frank and Ed managed to separate themselves from their other companions, when the three at once set off up the river. About daylight they joined Old Wolverine at the point designated; when the four moved on and finally encamped in a clump of dense timber about two miles below Spirit Rapids. Here

they remained during the day, and as soon as night set in, Frank Ballard left the camp and bent his footsteps in the direction of the Rapids.

All knew what was taking him up there—a woman.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A BLOW IN THE DARK.

An hour's walking brought Ballard to the foot of Spirit Rapids. It was then dark, but in hopes of getting to see Edith Mount, she whom he had saved from the river, he lingered there for a long time—so long a time, indeed, that he began to despair of her coming; when suddenly a soft step sounded behind him, and a hand was laid gently upon his arm.

"Frank."

"Edith."

And the two stood face to face. Frank lifted her hand to his lips and imprinted a kiss upon it, as had once been his wont in days gone by.

"I was looking for you on the other side," he said.

"And I have been waiting for you on this side," she replied; "I knew when you came, but it was so dark that I could not distinguish your features; so I remained quiet until I was sure it was you."

"Oh, Edith! this reminds me of old times. The sound of your sweet voice and the touch of those little hands thrills my heart again with the joy I once felt. I have entertained hopes, since our last meeting, of our being able to fulfill the vows we made years ago."

"That cannot be, Frank, as I told you in the Indian camp the other night."

"Why not? Henry is dead; have you learned to love another?"

"No, no, Frank; you alone are the only man I ever loved. But there still is an obstacle between us. I can only wait and trust in God."

"I am sure I am at a loss to know what it is, Edith; but I observed that you feared that drunken Captain Spencer, the other night—do you know him?"

"To see him in such a drunken fit—or any man—would fill one's soul with fear," she replied. "Oa, I was so afraid you would be killed. Had Heaven not interfered in your behalf and caused the Unknown Marksman to shoot that Canadian, the latter would have shot you without a doubt."

"That Unknown Marksman is a terrible avenger, Edith," Frank said, gazing down into her eyes. "I should think you would live in mortal dread of him here in this secluded place."

"Not at all; for our home is inaccessible to strangers as you have doubtless observed," and Edith smiled.

"It is a question of great interest to me how you cross those rapids."

"I will tell you, having obtained brother's consent to do so: there is a narrow wire bridge stretched from shore to shore and resting on rocks at every few yards. It lies just under the surface of the water, and was placed there last summer when the August drouth nearly choked our rivers dry."

"Ah! this is the secret of the Spirit Rapids!"

"Overhead," continued Edith, "two wire cables are stretched from shore to shore, and by these we balance ourselves while crossing the hidden footbridge. We are all provided with gossamer, rubber suits to protect our feet and bodies during the passages. Here, I brought you a suit, expecting you, as per agreement. I want you to cross over with me. As it is now very dark, I will go ahead, and when I am across I will give the signal by striking on one of the balance wires. Then you can follow. It will be dangerous for two of us to go across at once, for the bridge is drawn very taut, and has already great pressure against it."

As she concluded, Edith advanced to the water's edge through a clump of dense bushes, followed by Frank. Having shown him how to find the bridge, and the two wire hand-railings, she stepped into the agitated waters and started across the stream.

With bated breath Frank watched her half-across the stream; then he went back where it was more open and donned the rubber suit, preparatory to starting over after her. He had himself in readiness in a few moments, and was awaiting Edith's signal when he was suddenly startled by the rush of feet behind him; but before he had time to speak or act, he received a heavy blow upon the head that felled him, unconscious, to the earth.

Then the assassin that beat him down stripped the rubber coat and leggings from his person and denuded them himself. Then having dragged the body of the young bee-hunter to the river and thrown it, as he supposed, into the water, he wiped the perspiration from his brow, uttered an oath significant of satisfaction, then turned and walked back to the spot where he had struck the youth down. A moment later he heard the blows of a stick stumping along the wire hand-railing, described by Edith, and pushing his way through the brush to the water's edge, the villain found the hidden bridge and started slowly across the river.

Edith, waiting on the opposite shore for the coming of her lover, laughed softly to herself

when she saw him, as she believed, approaching through the tossing waters, and licking his way with the extreme caution of a blind man.

The man's head and face was enclosed in the hood of the waterproof he wore; consequently the woman was unable to detect the startling fact that it was not Frank Ballard; and as soon as he landed, she took his arm, and they started up the steep hill, neither speaking during the ascent.

When they had gained the summit of the island they stopped to rest. Deep and dense were the shadows of the scrubby sycamores that covered the island, and rough and rugged the surface of the ground.

"Our cabin," Edith now said, with an air of relief, "is in a deep depression in the center of the island, and that is why it cannot be seen from shore."

"Indeed," said the man in an undertone, scarcely audible.

Without suspecting any thing, she led the way down a steep hill toward the cabin, and when near the edge of the plateau, something bounded across their path, causing the man to start violently.

"It was a deer, Frank," she said, laughing, "a tame deer. There were three on the island, but the one we thought the most about got away. It was as tame as a lamb, and brother's little girl, Dolly, had put tassels in his ears; and one day—the day it got away—she tied a ribbon around its neck to which was attached a gold locket. Why, Frank, you are shivering. I'm afraid crossing the river made you nervous."

"I'm chilly," the man replied in a chattering tone.

"Well, we will soon be at the house, though I see brother has come home—at least I see a light in the cabin. If you will please be so kind as to wait here, Frank, until I run in and apprise brother of your coming, I will be obliged to you. I know you will be welcome, but these men folks are rather queer fellows."

He stopped without any words. Edith withdrew her arm from his, and ran on into the cabin.

The moment she was gone, the man threw back the hood from his head, and on tip-toe advanced to the window of the cabin, and peered in.

He saw a little girl, seated at one side of the house, playing with a kitten; while nearer to the window was a man before a blazing fireplace or forge, that was being fanned by a small hand-bellows. In the fire was a crucible, and in the hand of the man before the fire were a pair of bullet-molds. The man's face was covered by a sort of leather visor, evidently to protect it from the glare of the roaring flame; and the villain at the window felt a pang of disappointment when he saw the man's face was masked. He kept his watch, however, at the window, and when Edith entered he saw the man look up and speak. A few words passed between them, then the man removed his crucible from the fire and put it away, along with his mold and bellows. This done, he adjusted his visor, and as he did so he happened to glance toward the window, and started back with a cry of horror.

"My God, Edith! look there! It is the face of—"

"Who, brother?" cried Edith, for the face was withdrawn before she could catch a glimpse of it.

But without waiting for an answer, Edith ran out of the cabin, and hurried toward the cloaked figure awaiting her. When within a few paces of the villain, he thrust out his hand in which was a pistol, and fired, point-blank, at her.

"Oh, Frank! Frank!" cried the woman, starting back and sinking to the earth, "you have killed me!"

With a wild, demoniac laugh, the murderer turned upon his heel and fled toward the hidden bridge at the foot of the rapids.

CHAPTER XIX.

"RICHARD HIMSELF AGAIN."

The blow that felled Frank Ballard to the earth was not a fatal one. The rubber hood drawn over his head had saved his life, no doubt; for it broke the force of the blow and he was only stunned. But when he had recovered, it was with a violent pain in the head, and a thousand horrors flitting through his brain. He found that he had been lying partially in the water's edge, and, in fact, was seated in the water when he recovered consciousness. How he had come there he knew no more than if he had never existed until that moment. It was pitchy dark where he lay, but out before him he could see the moonlight falling on the river.

With an almost dizzy brain he endeavored to study out his situation. Vague glimpses of the past flitted and flashed in painful mockery before his mental vision; but, aided by the roar of the rapids, he finally succeeded in gathering the links of his shattered memory. All the past, up to the moment it had been so suddenly and violently blotted out, burst upon his mind, causing him to start with fear and horror. His first thought was of Edith; and he started up call-

ing her name; but there was no answer. He glanced up at the moon, and seeing the night was far advanced his heart sunk within his breast. When he discovered that his rubber suit had been taken from him, grave fears took possession of his mind; for something of the real truth flashed through his perturbed mind. He became sorely anxious to hear from Edith, and had resolved to cross over to the island just as he was, when a voice cried out:

"Stand!"

Frank, standing bolt upright, turned his face toward the unknown, who stood concealed in the bushes.

"Who are you?" the voice again demanded.

"Frank Ballard," was the answer.

"Murderer!" hissed the unseen.

A chill crept through Frank's heart.

"I am not a murderer," he replied.

"You betrayed the confidence of my sister, and then attempted to kill her."

"Whom do you mean; Edith Mount?" asked Frank.

"Yes," was the reply.

"You are mistaken," replied Frank, speaking with the candor of innocence; "I was going to the island with Edith when some devil beat me down and having stripped off my cloak flung me into the river. And there have I lain for—well, I can't tell you how long. I recovered but a few moments ago. This, sir, is the God's truth; and I have a welt across my head big as a man's arm to bear witness to what I say. Do you believe what I tell you?"

"I believe you, sir; your story corresponds exactly with Edith's supposition; and I came over here to hunt for your dead body," replied the brother.

"Then Edith is not dead?"

"No; but she is severely wounded. The demon that came to the island in your place shot her."

"Can I see her?" Frank asked.

"Not to-night; she must rest. When she learns that you are alive she'll rest easier. At first we thought you had done the shooting; but a calm, second thought convinced her to the contrary."

Frank groaned in spirit, turned and sat down.

"Good-evening, Mr. Ballard," said the speaker in the shadows; then he advanced to the water's edge and was soon moving across the wire-bridge toward Castle Island.

Frank arose, bathed his aching head, and then started back to camp where he arrived about an hour before daybreak. His friends, who had passed over a restless night in consequence of his prolonged absence, were surprised by the look of pain upon his face; and at once inquired after the cause.

Frank sat down and told them all about his night's adventures, concealing nothing of the mysteries of Spirit Rapids and Castle Island.

"Well, by the witches of Salem!" exclaimed Old Wolverine, "did you ever dream of such things?"

Goliath Strong seemed wonderfully surprised by the young bee-hunter's story; and many were the expressions of surprise that passed between him and Old Wolverine in regard to the matter.

Daylight at length came, and with the first streaks of light, Wolverine shouldered his gun and set off in search of game for breakfast. In the course of an hour he returned with two fat young wild-turkeys, which he at once dressed in true hunter style, and arranged before a fire to roast.

Meanwhile Goliath Strong and the bee-hunters had gone down to a little purling stream hard by and made a thorough ablution, which strengthened their bodies, invigorated their blood, and sharpened their appetites.

When they returned to camp the turkeys were done to a crisp brown, and ready to be served. All ate with avidity—particularly Frank, who declared he was never so hungry in his life, and that the turkey was the most delicious game he had ever tasted.

After their meal they made no move toward continuing their journey. For some reason or other, Goliath Strong and Old Wolverine concluded they had better remain there in camp a few days. They gave no reason for this inactivity; and since the bee-hunters were in no ways concerned about the Unknown Marksman, they did not insist on any explanation.

As the day advanced Wolverine again took his rifle and dogs and went in search of game. Goliath Strong seated himself at the foot of a tree and taking a slip of paper from an inner pocket busied himself for more than two hours looking over it. Ed and Frank noticed that he studied it with contracted brows, as though it contained some profound problem; but it was with a look of disappointment that he finally folded the paper and carefully replaced it in his pocket.

Thus the day wore away and night again set in. Ed and Frank laid down to rest; Old Wolverine left camp and went scouting in the direction of Spirit Rapids. Goliath Strong alone remained seated by the camp-fire, and when assured that his companions were asleep he took out that same paper and again began its study.

Frank, who lay with his head partially covered with his hat, slyly watched the giant hunter. He could not sleep, for he thought the two hunters were acting rather queerly. He did not know what to make of their conduct; and, feigning sleep, determined to watch their movements.

Goliath pondered and grimaced over the paper for hours, and would have probably continued so all night, had Old Wolverine not returned.

"Make anything out yit, G'liar?" the wolf-hunter asked, as he leaned his gun against a tree and removed his accouterments.

"Not a thing," Goliath replied, with a frown that denoted his vexation: "it is just like confusion, with footing enough to lead one on deeper and deeper into its tangled mazes."

"Hav'n't you showed it to the boys, yit?"

"No; I thought I would work on it to-night, and then, if I couldn't figure it out, I would turn it over to them," replied Goliath.

"They might fetch it, G'liar," replied Wolverine; "for I tell yo them boys are long-headed."

"I'll let them into it to-morrow," declared Goliath.

Wondering what secret existed between the hunters, in which he was soon to become a confidant, Frank Ballard went to sleep, and slept soundly until all were awakened the next morning by the startling report of a rifle in camp.

Springing to their feet, they saw Old Wolverine standing at one side, with his rifle in hand, while down in the hollow, about seventy paces away, a deer lay struggling in its death throes.

"We'll have roasted venison for breakfast," announced the hunter.

"And when we have breakfasted, boys," said Goliath, addressing Frank and Ed, "I have a puzzle, or problem, that I want you to help me work out."

"What kind of a problem?" asked Ed.

"A financial problem—one worth a fortune to your young friend, Nathan Darrall."

CHAPTER XX.

CAPTAIN SPENCER GETS A "WELT."

On the fourth night after the meeting at the Five Points, four men emerged from the shadows of the woods, and paused on the river bank opposite Castle Island. They were all well armed, which was evidence of their being upon the trail of the dread Unknown Marksman.

One of them was Randolph Spencer; another James Trimble; the other two were lumbermen.

"Right here," the captain said, as he passed near the foot of the rapids, "is that concealed bridge of which I was telling you. You will all have to use extreme care in crossing, for only one can cross at a time. A misstep will be your death-warrant."

"Very well, Cap., you go ahead," said Trimble.

Spencer explored along the bank until he had found the hidden bridge, then he reached up and caught hold of the balance-wires, and began picking his way across the dizzy waters, slowly, cautiously.

Owing to the darkness of the night, and the rising mist, he was soon lost from sight; but when he arrived on the opposite side, he telegraphed the fact to his friends by striking upon one of the wires, the end of which was fastened to a tree.

Trimble was the next to cross; then followed the two lumbermen, and when they were all together on the island, the captain led the way to the summit of the hill, and paused to give further orders.

"Here we are, boys, on Castle Island," he exclaimed.

"So I perceive," replied Trimble, "and from the familiar way in which you saunter about, one would think you had been here before, captain."

"Well, what next?" asked one of the lumbermen, very impatiently. "I want to keep moving, now that I'm started."

"The cat in stands in a deep sink or hollow in the very center of the island," replied Spencer; "and I would suggest that we go down and reconnoiter around."

The captain led the way down the hill toward the lonely hut of the mysterious people. As it became unfolded from the cover of the sycamores, a light was seen shining from the window. This told them that the occupants were at home.

The four advanced to within twenty paces of the door, then stopped under some trees to consult.

"What now, captain?" asked Trimble.

"Let us creep up as close as we can, then dash in upon them with drawn weapons," replied Spencer, speaking in a quick, nervous tone, scarcely above a whisper.

"Lead the way, Captain Randolph," said Trimble.

The captain moved forward, revolver in hand, and when about ten feet from the door, he gave a yell and bounded into the cabin followed by his companions. But, surprise and disappointment were all that met them, for

not a living soul, except themselves, was in the cabin. A smoldering fire on the hearth lit up the room. This must have been fed within the past hour, but where were the hands that did it?

As the intruders gazed about the room, they became deeply impressed by the silence and air of mystery that seemed to pervade the place.

The house was furnished with all the comforts of a border home. The neatness and handiwork of woman were upon every side.

"They must have got wind of our coming and fled," said Trimble, and his voice sounded hollow and strange to his companions.

"It seems to me there's been a funeral 'bout here recently," remarked Spencer, with a look that implied more than his words; "but let's to work and search every hole and corner in this house and on the island."

All seemed anxious enough to obey, and in a few minutes the house had been thoroughly searched; but nothing could be found of the inhabitants of the place.

Daylight found them still hunting; but in vain. The place was deserted by all save two or three tame deer and a troop of bright-eyed squirrels that frisked about uneasily.

"They are gone," Spencer finally admitted; "but they may return; and so I am going to remain here and take them by surprise."

"You'll not catch them napping, Cap," declared Trimble; "it is my opinion that the inhabitants of this island, whoever they may be, have friends among us who keep them posted."

"I believe that, Jim; and somehow or other, I can't help suspecting Old Wolverine. He acted queer the other night. Don't you think so?"

"Not any more so than that Goliath Strong."

"Well, time will tell; if you will remain with me, we will watch here for the return of the folks. I'm satisfied that it's the haunt of the Unknown Marksman, from what I told you."

Trimble volunteered to remain with the captain; and so the two lumbermen at once took their departure for the mainland.

The two partners in rascality remained on the island nearly the whole day, waiting in vain for the return of the inhabitants. Once Tim'lo noticed his companion walking about searching the ground in a manner that appealed to his curiosity, and so he asked:

"What are you hunting, Cap?"

"Oh, I was just looking for a fresh mound—in other words, a grave," replied Spencer.

"A grave?" exclaimed Trimble; "why should you expect to find a grave here?"

"I didn't know but what some of the folks had gone 'over the hills,' as Wolverine says, and that the others had deserted the island."

"Exactly," responded Trimble, and he joined in the search.

As the hours wore on the two finally ascended the heights overlooking the river, and ran their eyes carefully along the wooded shores beyond. While gazing across the rapids, Trimble saw a puff of smoke burst from the bushes on the opposite shore; and at the same instant Captain Spencer staggered and almost fell; while the crack of a rifle rung out clear and distinct above the roar of the rapids.

A bullet had just grazed the forehead of the captain, raising a livid welt from which the blood seemed ready to burst.

Following up the course of the bullet, Trimble found where it had struck a tree, and in a few minutes he dug it out with the point of his knife.

It was a copper bullet! This discovery sent a chill to Spencer's heart. "By heavens, captain! you, too, have got a welt across the head from the Unknown Marksman. We are either proof against his accursed copper bullets, or else he is toying with us as a cat plays with a mouse. Ah, look! do you see that figure gliding among the trees over yonder? 'Tis he—the Unknown Marksman!"

CHAPTER XXI.

LOVE AND JEALOUSY.

NATTIE DARRALL remained at the home of the old cranberry-picker several days; and in this time he fully recovered from his injuries under the kind and loving treatment of Ida Zane and her gentle-hearted mother. On the sixth day after his advent to their secluded home, he made preparations to leave and rejoin his friends. He disliked to inflict himself upon the good people, for he saw that they were very poor. Yet, out of the generosity of their hearts, they seemed ready and willing to sacrifice their own comfort that their guest might be provided for; and so Nattie felt loth to accept of such self-sacrifice in his behalf, since he had but little money to pay them; and even this they refused when he offered it to them.

When he was about ready to leave the cabin Ida approached him with a handsome little sporting rifle and accoutrements, and said:

"Nattie, I am not going to give you this rifle, but loan it to you, seeing you have none. No one should go unarmed in the woods nowa-

days. Besides," and a blush stole over her pretty face, "you will have to come back here to return it to me."

"Couldn't I send it back?" he asked.

"No, sir," she replied, and a smile wreathed her lips. "I will receive it from no one but you."

"Then I will accept of your proffered loan for the sake of coming back; for the fact of it is, Ida, I hate to go away. Since my advent here, a great change has come over my happiness and peace of heart; and the Blue Marsh, and the people dwelling here, will ever stand foremost in my memory. You may think me very foolish, Ida, for saying so, but since I came here I have learned to love, and you are the object of that love."

Ida's head drooped and a crimson flush overspread her face. Nathan's words had fallen upon her ears like the sweet inspiration of a song. Her thoughts ran back over the past. She recalled her last meeting with Spencer, and his definition of love; then she looked into her young heart and asked herself whether or not she loved Nathan Darrall; but whatever answer she found there, she made no reply to Nathan's impassioned words.

Nathan had been encouraged in his confession of love by her remarks concerning the gun; and her silence now was to him full of the happiest meaning. Instinct, rendered acute by love, told him this.

Having bidden the old folks good-by, Nathan took his departure, accompanied by Ida, who was to take him across the creek in her boat. They walked leisurely down the green island slope to the creek, launched the boat and embarked. Nathan took the paddle, and seating himself by Ida on the middle seat, paddled out into the center of the stream, and then let the boat drift at the will of the current.

"Ida," he then said, "I do wish I lived near the Blue Marsh."

"I am sure it is not a very romantic place," she said, her eyes looking up into his and beaming with joy.

"No; but these around it make it attractive to me—you in particular, Ida. To you I owe my life; you have won my heart, and oh, if my love could only be reciprocated, then could I go away and return with a light footprint and happy mind."

"Nathan, you will ever be welcomed at our humble home," the maiden replied.

"As a friend?"

"As a dear friend."

"Can I never call you by any more endearing name, Ida? Could I not some day have the privilege of calling you my little wife?"

Ida's eyes drooped shyly, and her lips quivered as she replied:

"Nattie, I do love you, but I could never think of leaving my mother and grandpapa."

"You never shall, Ida!" he exclaimed, in a passion of love, drawing her to his side and imprinting a kiss upon her brow. "It is enough for me to know that you love me. I can wait, for I am but a boy yet. Some day, perhaps, our love and our lives can be forever sealed."

Ida lifted her eyes and glanced away toward the forest as if looking into the future—to that blissful day. But the smile of infinite glory that lit up her lovely, childlike face faded away, and a cloud, whose darkness seemed to overshadow her young heart, settled upon her brow when she caught sight of Captain Spencer coming up the creek.

"Do not build up your future hopes on that, Nattie," she responded, "for they may be blasted. My mother and grandfather wish me to marry Captain Randolph Spencer."

A sigh that almost deepened into a groan escaped Nattie's lips.

"At first they discouraged Mr. Spencer's suit," Ida continued; "but he is rich and promised them a home of plenty; and as they are growing old, and we are very poor, would it be right for me to disobey them, Nathan?"

"Ida, this is terrible news to me—a hard question for me to answer conscientiously; for while it is your duty to obey your parents, it seems cruel in them to inflict a life of misery on their child by having her marry Randolph Spencer, who I have always heard is a bad man. Talk with your people, Ida, and perhaps they will think better of your happiness. I am a poor boy, with a widowed mother depending upon me for sustenance; but I am not only willing to work for you, but for them also. Tell them of our love, and the misery our separation will entail upon our lives. I know your mother is too noble and generous-hearted to insist upon a life of misery for her child. In a day or two I will come back—yes, I will return every day, Ida, until I know it is useless for me to come again."

By this time the boat had drifted some distance down the creek, and so, dipping the paddle, Nattie set the craft ashore. As he rose to depart, he took Ida's hand in his, and, stooping, imprinted a kiss upon her lips; then tearing himself away and leaping ashore, he bid her adieu, and turning, walked rapidly away, his young heart in a tumult of joy and fear combined.

Tears came into the maiden's eyes as she

watched the manly form of her boy lover receding in the distance; and a mental abstraction settled over her mind. She had forgotten that she had seen the form of Captain Spencer some distance down the creek, until startled from her reverie by the sound of approaching footsteps. Looking up, she saw Captain Spencer standing on the bank of the creek, with one foot on the prow of the boat.

"Good-morning, Miss Zane!" he said, rather sarcastically, as he unceremoniously stepped into the canoe and seated himself; "I hope I find you well; I see you are looking very happy."

"Quite happy, indeed," she answered, a little disturbed by his rudeness of manner.

"I should think so," he continued, with a frown, "when you can ride out with a young adventurer like the one that just left you, and have him kissing you at every turn."

"Captain Spencer," she said, a little indignantly, "Nathan Darrall is no adventurer—he is a gentleman."

"Admitting this to be the truth, what right have you—my betrothed wife—to allow other men such liberties as he took with you?"

"I lev. Nathan Darrall!" she replied, her eyes flashing defiantly, and her lip curling with scorn.

"Love!" he sneered, cut to the quick by her reply; "well indeed! this is a singular case; but I'm of the opinion that love will not go where sent this time. I shall now insist on you or your mother fixing the day for our marriage."

"Mother may, but I will never!"

"Whew! that lere of yours for a beggar boy is scouring your temper, my little dove; but then we'll doctor that when you become the queen of Castle Spencer. We will now return to the cabin and have your mother arrange matters at once," and so saying, he took up the paddle and pushed off from shore, and then turned up the stream—the dark cloud of jealousy sitting upon his brow—the brow upon which still blazed the livid track of the Unknown Marksman's bullet.

CHAPTER XXII.

RUN DOWN.

THE search for the Unknown Marksman went on day after day without any decided result. The great circle of hunters had closed in, spread out, and closed in again; but nothing could be found of the avenger save now and then a victim. Many believed, not only from the desertion of Castle Island, but the manner in which the enemy eluded them, that the destroyer had been warned of the general hunt being made for him, and thereby enabled to dodge the hunters. Men, however, were stationed to watch the island so that if any of its mysterious inhabitants did return they might be captured, and inquiry made into their secluded life.

After leaving the island, Captain Spencer and his friend Trimble were joined by four lumbermen; and together the six continued the search. They had penetrated to the heart of the great forest between the Five Points and Alleghany, when the report of a rifle came rebounding through the woods. Believing that it might have been fired by the object of their search, the men began a careful reconnaissance of the woods in the direction whence the sound came. They had not gone far when they discovered the figure of a man seated on a log by the roadside, his head down and his hands apparently employed in whittling. The shadows were so dense that they could not recognize the form, though the general outlines appeared to be those of an Indian; or of a man dressed as an Indian.

Captain Spencer removed his boots and coat, and then with a revolver in his hand, he carefully moved toward the unknown. He placed a large tree between him and the man, while his companions covered him with their rifles.

When the captain reached the tree he was not over twenty paces from the man on the log, and after he had rested a moment, he peered cautiously around the oak and discovered that the figure was that of an Indian, true enough. In one hand he held a knife, and in the other a large leaden bullet, at which he was carelessly whittling, while his mind was, apparently, fixed upon something else.

A cloud of disappointment swept over Spencer's face when he recognized the Indian as Running Deer, the Alleghany mail-carrier, who had stopped by the way to rest, and eat a lunch—remnants of which were on the log at his side.

Stepping from behind the tree, Spencer approached the mail-carrier, saying:

"I came devilish nigh killing you, Running Deer, thinking you were the Unknown Marksman."

"Then I am between two dangers—the Unknown Marksman and his pursuers," replied the Chippewa, putting away his knife and bullet.

"Hav'n't seen anything of the destroyer?" asked Captain Randolph.

"Nothing," replied the mail-carrier.

The rest of Spencer's companions came forward; and after a few minutes' conversation

Running Deer shouldered his rifle, slung his mail-sack under his arm, and trudged away on his journey to Alleghan.

Spencer and his men set off in the direction of the Blue Marsh; and when a couple of miles from that point, they killed a wild turkey and several squirrels and stopped to prepare them for supper, although it wanted two or three hours until supper-time. While his companions were engaged in dressing and preparing the game, Captain Spencer concluded to make a flying visit over to the cabin of old Cranberry. Before he left, however, it was understood that they were to remain there in camp until morning.

The captain had not been gone more than an hour when the sharp report of a rifle burst through the woods, and one of the lumbermen, a half-breed Indian, named Girsch, fell dead.

That the Unknown Marksman had dealt the fatal blow, Trimble and his companions had not a single doubt, though they did not take time to examine the body; but, seizing their rifles on the instant, they charged into the woods in the direction whence the report came.

By this time the shadows were deepening in the woods, and objects were rendered somewhat indistinct; still, the men had gone but a short way when they saw the figure of a man fleeing before them. In his hand the fugitive carried a rifle, and that the pursuers had at last got sight of the terrible avenger they had not a single doubt; and, inspired by the spirit of vengeance, and the thoughts of being the successful man-hunters, they fairly doubled upon the foe at every bound.

Not once did they permit him to escape from sight, and in hopes of bringing him down or to a stand, they kept up a running fire upon him until their weapons were all emptied; but none of the random shots took effect, and the chase continued. On through the twilight shadows they sped, and when they saw the fugitive looking back over his shoulder like a wounded buck, they knew that he was nearly exhausted. This encouraged the pursuers, and at length Trimble called out:

"Halt, demon, or I'll fire!"

The demon stopped and sunk half-exhausted to the ground.

With a yell of demoniac triumph the lumbermen rushed upon him.

"At last! at last, the fiend is secured!" gasped Trimble, nearly out of breath.

"Easy, gentlemen, I implore you," begged the fugitive, whom they found to be a handsome lad—a mere boy in years.

"I'd say easy, I would," yelled a lumberman.

"Gentlemen," pleaded the youth, "there is a mistake here, I assure you. Let me explain."

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared Trimble; "hear the wretch, will you? By heavens, we'll explain the situation to you, you young fiend incarnate!"

"We'd ought to draw and quarter him on this very spot," declared a lumberman.

"Gentlemen," began the captive, but a blow from one of the infuriated men cut short his speech.

"Look here at this rifle," cried Trimble, picking up the lad's gun; "a small bore—just the size exactly. Oh, Jehovah! I'm itching to bounce him!"

"Oh, there's no doubt of this cringing dog being the bloodthirsty wretch. Drag him back to camp and let's torture a confession out of him on burning coals. Lay hold of him, boys—don't be afraid. He's only a human—a very frail one at that. Hustle the little vampire along."

They ruthlessly seized him by the limbs and half carried and half dragged him back toward camp, his appeals for mercy being treated with blows and derision of the most brutal kind.

When they reached camp they tied him up to the limb of a tree by the thumbs; and then rested from the labors of the chase, which had well-nigh exhausted them. Meanwhile, they regarded the slight form of their prisoner with a mingled expression of surprise and triumph. They were surprised, for it seemed impossible that one so young, so honest and innocent in looks, could be guilty of such horrible deeds as he had committed.

Presently Trimble arose, and stepping up to the prisoner, looked him squarely in the face, then said:

"Youngster, it seems to me that I have seen somebody that you resemble: would you object to telling me your name?"

"Not at all, sir," replied the lad, in a firm, manly tone; "I am not ashamed of my name: it is Nathan Darrall."

CHAPTER XXIII.

GOLIAH TELLS ED AND FRANK A SECRET.

AFTER breakfasting on roast venison prepared by Old Wolverine, Goliah Strong turned to Frank Ballard and Ed Matthews, and said:

"Now, boys, I'm going to let you into a secret; and to begin, I might as well tell you that I am not a hunter by profession, unless you'd call me a rascal-hunter."

"Ay!" exclaimed Frank; "you are, as we have mistrusted, a detective."

"Well, admitting such to be the case, I will tell you now why I have manifested such an interest in you bee-hunters: it is on account of Nattie Darrall. One year ago this very month I was after some men for forgery; and suspicion being fixed upon Captain Spencer, I managed to board a raft of logs, one dark night, with which Spencer was on his way to South Haven. As it happened—and to my benefit—some one else, who I have since learned was the Unknown Marksman, was aboard the raft at the same time, giving the captain considerable trouble. While he was out of the tent, plunging around with his men, I stepped in and laid a paper and pencil on the table, and when the captain came in, I thrust my revolver through the side of the tent from the outside, and compelled him to write certain words, sign his name, and then pass me the paper. My object was to obtain a specimen of his handwriting to be compared with that of the forged papers.

"Well, that night their raft was grounded, and they were compelled to lay up until late the next day, when they again got afloat. I remained along the shore under cover of the woods, for I was determined to see the captain through to South Haven. About dark, or a little after, on the following night, who should come up the river to meet them but Mr. James Trimble and two other men. I at once came to the conclusion that it would pay me to board that raft again; and I did so—a pitchy darkness aiding me in my movements. Creeping to the rear of the raftsmen's tent, what was my surprise to hear them talking about some notes and a mortgage that they had given to Nattie Darrall's father."

"Ah, indeed!" exclaimed Frank, somewhat excited.

"I soon learned," continued the big detective, "that they had employed a man named Thomas Thoms to rob Mr. Darrall of the papers in order to cheat him out of the money."

"Great mercy! I never believed Spencer was such a villain as that," said Ed Matthews.

"Ho! ho!" chuckled Old Wolverine; "it's 'cause you don't know him, then; but go ahead, Goliath."

"Well, I soon discovered that Thomas Thoms succeeded in stealing the papers, but instead of destroying them, or delivering them up to his employers, he went off and buried them. So the matter rested, and time drifted on. At last Thomas Thoms was apprehended for some other crime, and sentenced to be hung. The rascal thought he couldn't die easy without making a confession of his sins in stealing the papers, though, true to his employers, in one sense of the word, till the last, he did not confess their part of the deed, nor implicate them in any way. It was from their own lips that I learned of their meanness. Before dying, Thomas Thoms drew up a sort of a map of the country, including a portion of the three Black rivers, and above and below this map he wrote an explanation, telling where the hidden papers could be found. This document he intrusted to an ignorant half-breed, who was to deliver it to Nathan Darrall or his mother; but Trimble happening to meet him, suspected something, and got the paper from the ignoramus."

"Then all hopes are gone," said Frank, regretfully.

"Wait till I get through; it appears that the half-breed, ignorant of the value of the paper, took the liberty to tear a strip off each end, thereby destroying over half of the reading, so that, after a year's studying, I have been unable to make out where the papers are buried."

"Ah! then you have the paper?"

"Yes; while Trimble and Spencer sat in the tent, talking the matter over, they concluded to consign it to the flames: and just as the captain reached forward toward the candle burning on the table before him, I thrust my arm into the tent, and snatching the paper from his fingers, made good my escape with the document; and, to this day, he knows not who did the rash act."

An exclamation burst from the bee-hunters' lips; while Old Wolverine chuckled with silent laughter.

"Here is the paper itself," said Goliah, producing that strange, unintelligible document, which we have heretofore spread before the reader.

Frank took the paper, and together he and Ed looked it over; though they could tell no more, by the writing and map upon it, of the place of the buried papers, than though it had been a fragment of Greek manuscript.

"Here," said Frank, "is a portion of the Middle Black river, and the confluence and full length of the North and South rivers. These dots along here, I presume, are intended to represent the timber. Here is the great bend between the mouth of the two main branches, and—"

"Yes," added Ed, "and we're encamped right in that very bend."

"Let's see what it reads," continued Frank,

and turning the paper around he read the broken lines aloud. But they could make no sense out of it.

"If you can supply the missing words there, boys, Nathan Darrall will be worth forty-five thousand dollars, and interest on the same for a great many years," said Goliah Strong.

"I will do my mightiest," said Frank. "Heavens! wouldn't I like to find those papers and be the first to break the news to Nattie and his mother? I'll just keep this, Goliah, and look over it."

Both Frank and Ed were greatly excited over the paper; they could not have betrayed more interest in behalf of a brother than in Nattie Darrall; and they declared their intention of supplying the missing words if such a thing were possible.

All day the boys worked over the puzzle. Now and then one, or both of them, were pacing to and fro beneath the trees absorbed in deep, mental labor. But night again set in, and the secret of the torn paper remained unsolved.

"I'll not give it up yet," said Frank, as he handed the document back to Goliah; "I'll try and dream it out to-night."

Thus the matter was permitted to drop for the time being; and shortly after darkness set in the four broke camp and moved away in the direction of the Blue Marsh, intending to call at Old Cranberry's cabin the next morning to inquire after the health of Nattie.

They were moving along about two miles from the Marsh, conversing on most any topic that presented itself, when they suddenly caught the sound of wild, excited voices. Looking in the direction whence it emanated they discovered the glowing reflections of a camp-fire against the overhanging foliage, not over twenty rods away. Satisfied that it was the camp or bivouac of some of the avenger-hunters, the four turned their steps in that direction.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE WRONG MAN AGAIN.

"NATHAN DARRALL," repeated James Trimble, with a nervous start, when the helpless young bee-hunter had made known his name. "Nathan Darrall; I don't know but what I have heard, incidentally, the name spoken before; but, be that as it may, do you know, Nathan, that you are likely to never see another sunrise? Do you know that you are in a fair way to be drawn and quartered? I say, do you really think this possible?"

"At your hands I think nothing impossible," replied Nattie, "for you will not listen to reason."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the South Haven gambler, "what, within the bounds of reason, has such a bloodthirsty wretch as you got to offer? Have you any excuse to make for murdering that man lying there? Speak out, you young ghoul."

"I did not murder him," replied Nattie, resolutely.

"Hear the lying dog," yelled one Gus Hirsch; "I've a notion to strangle him."

"I'll swear I did not kill him," persisted the youth; "I will swear it with uplifted hands before an avenging God."

"Uplifted hands!" sneered Hirsch; "that's good, seein' his hands are tied up now by the thumbs. But, young bloodthirsty, you'll swear that away if you sw'ar at all."

"Gentlemen," Nattie persisted, "I did not fire the shot that killed your friend. There was a man in the bushes near where I stood, and it was he who fired it. I was not over ten feet from him and would have fired upon him when I saw he had shot one of your men, had I not seen you coming."

"And run," added Trimble, facetiously.

"Yes, run; I was so excited and frustrated by the report of the rifle and your cry of vengeance and excited appearance that, I must confess, I found myself running ere I was aware of what I was doing."

"A pretty story, indeed," said Hirsch, his evil face wearing a vicious, malignant grin.

"Did you not see me within half a minute after the shot was fired?" Nattie asked.

"Yes; within a quarter of a minute," said Trimble.

"Then you know I could not have had time to reload my gun; and if you will examine it you will find it is now loaded."

"That may all be; you could have managed some way to slip in a load. As cunning a dog as you could work that. Moreover, we saw the very smoke from your gun hanging before you."

"The smoke from the Unknown Destroyer's gun floated out before me," Nattie responded.

The men burst into a roar of mocking laughter.

"Oh, that'll do to tell; but it won't scour with us—hullo! here comes the captain. Ha, old boy; we've got him this time."

Captain Spencer, at this juncture, rode into camp, glanced at Nattie, then dismounting hitched his horse near and turning exclaimed:

"Heigh-ho! what have you got here, boys?"

"A dead man, i was sorry to say, a picia,

and his murderer; I am *happy* to inform you. Look, captain, upon the Unknown Marksman!"

As Captain Spencer glanced at the face of one of his men a sigh of regret escaped his lips; and when he had transferred his gaze to the face of Nattie Darrall he started with a low exclamation of surprise; then a cloud of fierce triumph overcast his whole countenance and changed his features into those of a savage demon.

"Men!" he shrieked, with a horrible oath, "do you know he is the infernal murderer?"

"We do; we just as good as seen him fire the dead shot that slew Clem."

"I deny that man being slain by me," said Nattie, "and you will believe me when it is too late."

"Of course, he denies it; but it's natural that he should. But, captain, his name is Nattie Darrall."

"What?" exclaimed the captain, with a start, and he turned and plucked Trimble aside, when in a low tone he continued: "is this a fact?—is that young Darrall?"

"He told me his name was Nathan Darrall," replied Trimble. "I'm willing to take his word for that, anyhow."

"Then he must be hung, demon or no demon. We will never be safe as long as he and his mother live—especially if those papers should ever turn up."

"There is no doubt of his having killed Clem," said Trimble. "The case is too plain to admit of a single doubt."

"Well, the evidence of four men is as good as his denial, and therefore he must not escape," declared Spencer.

They returned to the fire, when Spencer took up Nattie's rifle and examined it carefully.

"This rifle speaks against you, young man," he said, addressing the prisoner; "there is not another of as small a bore in this country. I see it is loaded; there is no doubt a copper bullet in it."

"That gun," said Nattie, "is a borrowed one. It belongs to the old cranberry-picker's daughter."

Trimble nudged Spencer and laughed sardonically; while a cloud of jealous anger swept over the face of the latter, as thoughts of what he had seen that day occurred to his mind.

"I'll admit," said the captain, "that he was fooling around Old Cranberry's girl to-day, for I saw him; though I did not know him at the time. But that will make no difference with me, and all the worse for him. Boys, what shall be done with the young murderer? Speak out; the evidence is before you, and you're the jury."

"Hang him! hang him! burn him! quarter him!" shouted the men, as eager for the lad's life-blood as savages could have been.

"The majority says, 'hang him,' and so say I," exclaimed Spencer. "This, youngster, is the verdict."

"Gentlemen, will you not give me a trial?" asked Nattie, growing uneasy, for he saw the men were in earnest.

"No, sir; you deserve no trial," was the cruel reply.

"I can prove my entire innocence," the youth affirmed; "only give me time and I'll convince you of this."

"Hang him! hang him!" shouted the men, fiercely.

"Then lead up my horse for a scaffold," ordered the villain, Spencer.

The horse was led up under the tree where Nattie stood, and the youth was mounted upon his back; then the hitch-rein was removed from the bridle, and one end fastened around the prisoner's neck—the other thrown over a limb above his head and drawn almost taut, and there fastened.

Gus Hirsch held the horse by the bits, ready to lead it out from under the youth at a sign from the executioner.

"Now, young man," said Spencer, when all was ready to hurl him into eternity, "if you have any confession to make, or any thing to say, now is your time, for die you shall."

"I have no confession to make," replied the youth, almost choked by the feelings struggling upward in his breast; "but my request is that you return that rifle and outfit to its owner, Ida Zane."

"I'll attend to that," replied the cold, heartless demon at his side; "is that all? Be in a hurry; time is precious."

"There is my poor old mother," the youth continued, the tears welling into his eyes, and his lips quivering; "send her word, and tell her how I died, and that my last thoughts were of her. Tell her that I died for crimes of which I am innocent. Oh, my mother! my mother! may God have mercy upon her!"

"Stop that," whispered Trimble, touched to the guilty soul by the youth's sad words; "stop it, captain, or I'll be cussed if I don't give way."

"Is that all?" again demanded Spencer, whose heart was as hard and cold as adamant.

"That's all," replied Nathan.

"Then lead out the horse, Hirsch!"

But Hirsch did not do as bidden. Before he could move, a rifle in the shadows rung out,

and he fell dead at the horse's feet, shot through the head.

"My God! another fatal blunder!" cried Spencer. "The Unknown Destroyer is still at large—charge the bushes, men, charge!"

Under the awful excitement of the moment, every man seized his gun and plunged into the woods. The horse, left free, walked out from under Nathan Darrall, leaving the youth hanging by the neck between heaven and earth—his body swinging to and fro in the sickly glow of the bivouac fire.

CHAPTER XXV.

AN INGENIOUS LETTER.

As Spencer and his men plunged away into the woods in pursuit of the dread unknown, they never once stopped to think that the life of an innocent boy was left in jeopardy for the crimes of another. They sped on into the shadows like maddened beasts, and not until they were nearly exhausted did they take into consideration the foolhardiness of their chase, and come to a halt. Trimble was the first to think of Nattie Darrall and speak of the situation they left him in. The terrible truth seemed to paralyze them all.

"By heavens!" exclaimed Spencer, "I never once thought of the boy; that horse would never stand still under him with the scent of blood under his nose. I'm afraid the boy is a goner; but if he is, I sha'n't mourn. But let's saunter back, boys."

They started on a run back to camp, although they had little hopes of being in time, for fully ten minutes had elapsed since they had left. To their relief, however, in case they felt any compunctions, at all, for the deed they had almost committed, they found, on reaching camp, that Nattie had been cut down by Old Wolverine, Goliah Strong, Ed Matthews and Frank Ballard, who had arrived in the very nick of time to save the youth's life.

"By gracious!" exclaimed Trimble, in apparent delight, seeing they were bound to make the best of their situation, "it's a lucky thing you came, men, in time to save that boy. Nattie, I'll acknowledge I was wrong, and you were innocent. I believe now you told us the truth—yes, by criminy, I know you are."

"I care not whether you believe it or not," was Nattie's indignant retort; "you are, nevertheless, a coward, as are all your friends. This much I know."

"Well, if you wasn't a boy, I wouldn't take that," replied Trimble, flushing up with cowardly indignation.

"I'll stand responsible for anything the boy says—I will, by the eternal waters!" said Old Wolverine.

"I do not want trouble; neither do I want to be called a coward by a boy," replied Trimble, in a rather conciliatory tone.

"Well, I, Old Wolverine, am not a boy as anybody knows of," said the old wolf-hunter, his eyes blazing with indignation: "and yet I say you are all a set of cowards, poltroons, and villains, too."

"Old man, take that back, or a thrashing!" said the infuriated gambler and prize-fighter from South Haven, as he marched up toward Wolverine and squared off in scientific style to knock him down.

"Never!" said Old Wolverine, and before any one thought of such a thing, the hunter's left fist shot out, unexpectedly to Trimble, and was planted squarely in the gambler's face, sending him to the earth like an ox.

This was such an unlooked-for result that Spencer and his men, foreseeing trouble, at once interfered in behalf of peace.

"Hold on, men!" the captain said, stepping in between them; "you cannot afford to quarrel; you are too good men to become foes."

"I'd jist as lief fight as not," replied Old Wolverine; "I'd fight my grand-daddy if the old rat'd tried to run over a boy like that. Oh, I can kick, cap'n, with my fo'foot equal to a jassack."

"I am sorry any words should arise between us," the captain continued, in a conciliatory manner; "I was not here when the lad, Darrall, was captured; and the boys were so positive that he was the Destroyer that I could not gainsay them."

"It's always customary in civilized countries to give a man a trial before he is hanged," said Goliah Strong with deliberate coolness.

"I will admit the fact, Goliah," answered the captain, he being in no way desirous of opposing the giant hunter; "but there are, you know, some mitigating circumstances in favor of the boys' hasty action. You know we have been harassed almost to death by the Unknown Marksman—"

"Yes," interrupted Goliah, "I know you arrested me once, and proved me guilty of being the Destroyer; when the very man that bore false witness against me fell dead—a victim of the Unknown. You also suspected Old Wolverine the last night we were at the Five Points, and while you were searching for evidence to convict him, a bullet from the dread enemy was sent in through the open door and cut a

trench across your friend Trimble's forehead. Perhaps this enemy is the pursuing vengeance of the inscrutable God. Who knows but these very men who have fallen under an unseen hand are the companions in some terrible crime? And who knows but the Unknown Marksman is, not only one person, but a band of those silent and terrible vigilants that hunt down wrong-doers with the silence of death itself? When the truth of all this mystery is known, you'll find that no boys are at the bottom of it, now mind what I tell you."

"That may all be," assented Spencer, fixing a nervous look upon the big hunter, whose words sounded so prophetic.

"Thar's been very few killed, to my knowin'," said Old Wolverine, "but what could be spared better than any left. The Destroyer is very keen to kill some ornery French half-breed or lazy buck Ingin; I'll say that much for him."

"I hope, Wolverine, that you don't approve of such wholesale murder of men," Spencer remarked.

"Oh, no, not by any means. I war just sayin' he killed no good people."

Both Spencer and Trimble, notwithstanding the latter's black eye, now in this case, courted harmony between the two parties; although both were doubtless sorry, from the bottom of their hearts, that Nattie Darrall had escaped.

In the course of the night, Spencer and his men took their dead comrades and set out for Camp Spencer, leaving Old Wolverine and his party in possession of their camp.

No sooner were the lumbermen out of sight than Goliah Strong sat down by Nattie and said:

"Nattie, I felt in hopes that the next time I met you after the day we rescued you from the wolverines that I would be able to place in yours hands papers that would make you heir to a fortune."

Nattie looked up in surprise.

"Ay, Nattie!" exclaimed Frank, "our bee-hunting excursion may result in wealth to you yet."

"I do not understand you," said Nattie.

"I'll tell you," said Frank, in a low tone; "Goliah Strong is a detective; and he is on trace of these stolen papers that made your father a poor man."

"Indeed?" cried Nattie, wild with joy; "are those papers in existence?"

"They are supposed to be," replied Goliah; then he took that fragmentary document from his pocket and explained its whole history to Nattie, as we already know it.

Nattie's eyes glowed with inward joy while the big hunter sat narrating the story of the paper. His thoughts reverted to his old mother, and his heart leaped within his breast when he thought that her toiling and suffering in poverty would be ended, should those papers be found.

After Nattie had locked the torn letter and map of Thems carefully over, he passed it to Frank Ballard, who, moving to the opposite side of the fire, began to study it over.

"Oh, if we could only supply the missing links!" exclaimed Nattie, "then mother would no longer have to work—she would be comfortable all her life."

"Suppose these papers are found," said Ed, "couldn't Trimble and Spencer swear they were forgeries?"

"They could, and would, no doubt," replied Goliah, "but it can be proven, by myself, that they talked the matter over on the raft, and virtually admitted themselves the agents of the theft. Moreover, the seal of the officer, before whom the papers were acknowledged, would be indisputable evidence of the validity of the papers. If we find them, the first thing to be done is to place them upon the records of the court; then begin a suit of foreclosure."

"How long have you had the paper, Goliah?" Nattie asked.

"Over a year."

"Then there is not much hope of ever supplying the missing words."

"There is hope as long as there is life, Nattie."

"But there is sometimes hoping in vain."

"Yes, yes, Nattie; this I have found by experience—but now this reminds me of what I desire to ask concerning the people residing on the Blue Marsh."

"They are honorable people, Goliah; they are not fugitives from justice, I know," replied Nattie.

"No, no; I do not suspect them of wrong, Nattie. I only want to know if you made any inquiry, during your stay at the cabin, into the past history of old Cranberry's family."

"I did, Goliah, in a casual way," replied Nattie, "but I learned little of their past life. They were very silent as to the past; though I could see plain enough that trouble bore heavier upon Mrs. Zane than the weight of years. The old man, Mrs. Zane's father, is very feeble, and is not long for this world. He has seen man's allotted years—three-score and ten."

"Is Berry his true name? and that of Zane the true name of the woman?" questioned Goliah.

"I presume so; at least I have no reason to think contrary. They are noble-hearted people, that I do know."

"Mrs. Zane, then, is a widow?"

"Yes."

"Did you see no old books of any kind while you were there? or pictures of friends?"

"I was given several books to read during my convalescence; they were all old, time-worn books."

"Family relics, I presume," said Goliah.

"I can't say that they were, altogether, for none of them had the name of either family in them, though they may have been gifts from relatives and friends."

"What were the titles of the books? do you remember?" questioned the hunter.

"One was the 'Life of Washington,' another 'Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress,' another was a copy of 'Burns's Poems,' and—"

"Stop right there, Nattie," interrupted the hunter, "and answer me one question; did you notice the name written in 'Burns's Poems'?"

"I did," replied Nattie.

"Do you remember what it was?"

"It was Ambrose—"

"Ambrose Belmont," broke in the giant.

"The same; Ambrose Belmont," replied Nattie.

"Then I was right," said the man, and he appeared greatly agitated by some sudden emotion; "I have not hoped in vain, after all."

"Goliah, what do you know about them?" asked Nattie, greatly surprised by Goliah's emotions.

"Well, I'll tell you, though the story is not told in a minute. Years ago there dwelt far away from here in a pleasant home with his wife and a little girl named Zoe, Ambrose Belmont. I don't suppose there was a happier family on earth than that very family. Mrs. Belmont was a kind, affectionate woman of great culture and refinement, though of a very sensitive nature. When their little girl Zoe was about six or seven years of age Ambrose received the appointment of Government surveyor and was sent West into a newly organized territory to work. There he remained two years; and in the meantime he received letters from home—kind and affectionate in tone. Finally his labor was completed and he went home; and, oh, such a home as he found! It was deserted by wife and child—there was no one to greet him after his years of toil and happy anticipations."

"She had proven untrue to him," said Nattie.

"No, no, Nattie; no purer heart ever throbbed. I don't believe her mind ever harbored an evil thought. It was the forked tongue of that hydra-headed monster, the curse of society, the fountain of all wrong, the bane of happiness—the slanderer—that desolated the home of Ambrose Belmont. He did it out of a spirit of the most petty revenge. He had been a candidate for the position of Government surveyor and was defeated by Belmont; and, during the absence of the latter, had sought revenge by attacking the character of Mrs. Belmont. His charges at the time were so bold and highly polished with the semblance of truth that they seemed to carry conviction to the public mind; and crushed to earth under the finger of scorn, Mrs. Belmont took her child and fled from her home. She had become so despondent and broken-hearted that she could not think otherwise than that her husband, like the rest of the cold world, would give ear unto the tongue of the serpent that had invaded their Eden. She knew that it would be a deadlier blow to receive her husband's reproaches for charges of which she was innocent than the reproaches of all the world; and so she, poor thing, fled to parts unknown to conceal her bleeding heart from her husband's anger. But time went on, and years afterward the vengeance of an inscrutable God overtook the slanderer. His horse ran away with him, and, throwing him heavily to the earth, inflicted injuries upon him of which he finally died. But, before he ended his eventful career, he became penitent and made a full confession of his sins. The most grievous of these was the slandering of Mrs. Belmont to break up their home and happiness. He told Belmont, and those who had been the first to believe his story, and cry out against Mrs. Belmont, that every word was false—that he believed Mrs. Belmont as pure and innocent as the driven snow."

"The wretch! the monster!" broke in Nattie.

"But, you see," continued Goliah, "years had now passed, and the wrong seemed irreparable. However, Belmont advertised in nearly every paper of note in America for his wife; but no answer ever came. She seemed as completely lost to him as though the grave had claimed her; and, in fact, he finally concluded she must be dead. Still he lived on in hopes of some day hearing of his family; and when the last lingering ray had about died out, he, by the merest accident, ran across a girl who favored his wife so closely that he thought she must be his child. That girl is Ida Zane."

"And you, Goliah," exclaimed Nattie, "are her father, Ambrose Belmont."

"Yes; I am Ambrose Belmont."

Nattie gave utterance to a shout of joy that the midnight echoes sounded through the lonely halls of the night.

"Oh, what joy," he exclaimed, "this news will be to Ida Zane!"

"I thought I might possibly have been mistaken," said the big detective, for such he really was; "but the name in those books leaves no doubt in my mind now. Mrs. Zane and her daughter are my wife, Margery, and my daughter, Zoe. It was in hopes of finding them that I first applied for a position on the detective force employed by the Government. I was sent West to ferret out some gangs of counterfeiters, and, under the guise of a hunter, have I been following my avocation in this country; and while I am likely to succeed in capturing a notorious band, I am, also, likely to make you a rich boy, and myself a happy man. I must visit the Blue Marsh tomorrow, and end the suspense that has kept me so restless since the day you were rescued from the wolverines, and I first saw Ida Zane."

"Well, surely the hand of Fate works wonders," said Nattie Darrall. "Now, if he would only help me to unravel the mystery, or secret of that paper, then—"

"It is solved! it is solved!" suddenly burst from the lips of Frank Ballard, who had been seated at one side looking over the paper, and who, springing to his feet, waved the document above his head, and sent forth yell after yell of delight that made the old woods fairly ring.

"What do you mean, Frank? Have you supplied the missing links?"

"Yes, yes!" shouted Frank. "I have solved the riddle of this paper! Nathan Darrall, my boy, give me your hand, old chum, and allow me to congratulate you upon your success, for you are now a rich man!"

"Hist! hark!" said Old Wolverine, lifting his finger.

The next moment to the surprise and regret of all, James Trimble and Captain Spencer, followed by several of his men, suddenly returned to their night's bivouac.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FRANK AS A CRYPTOGRAPHER.

GOLIAH STRONG became somewhat surprised, as well as uneasy, at the sudden and unexpected return of Spencer and a number of his men. He felt satisfied that they had not had time to go all the way to Camp Spencer and back, in the short period that had elapsed since they had departed with their dead. He at once suspected Spencer and Trimble of having been eavesdropping about the camp; and, if so, they had doubtless heard what Frank Ballard had said concerning the solution of Thom's letter, and Nattie being a rich man.

Rising from the ground, the big detective walked around to where Frank stood, and, without a word, took the paper from his hand, and put it in his pocket, at the same time giving him a look invoking silence.

"Hullo, captain!" exclaimed Old Wolverine, as the lumberman and his friends entered camp. "Got back purty quick, didn't ye?"

"Yes; we didn't go up to camp. We met some of the boys and concluded to come back," said Spencer, running his eyes over the different faces in a manner that betrayed evident distrust.

Not another word was said concerning Frank's discovery, although it was like smothering a Vesuvius in each heart to keep back the feeling of joy and gladness that Ballard's announcement had awakened.

"Wal, I reckon as what you'll ledge with us to-night," said Old Wolverine, feeling around in his usual easy indifference.

"I think not," replied Spencer. "This gentleman," and he turned to a man whom none of our friends had ever seen before, and who wore a rather authoritative air, "is the sheriff of D— county, and has a warrant for the arrest of Goliah Strong."

"Yes, sir; I am sorry to say that I am compelled to arrest Mr. Strong," said the sheriff, taking some papers from his pocket, and advancing toward Goliah.

"Well, sheriff," said the big detective, suspecting some treachery the moment he spoke, "if you can take me, you'll have to be a better man than I."

"Then, sir, I am to understand that you will resist me, and my authority," said the sheriff, throwing all the force he could summon into his looks and words.

"I think I will not be taken," coolly responded Strong.

"I hope, Goliah," said Spencer, "that you will not resist, for Sheriff Macklin has pressed us into his service, and we cannot refuse to assist him without laying ourselves liable. The law, you know, is inexorable."

"That, now," chimed in Old Wolverine, "sounds more like the true ring; it's encouraging, it's promising. I haven't had a real, downright fight for some time; and so, if you insist

on arrestin' Goliah, why, you'll have a slippery time of it."

"Friend Wolverine," said Spencer, "we can't afford to quarrel while we should be united in the presence of the dangers that menace us."

"Then let Goliah alone; the fust man that attempts to tackle him 'll git the stuffin' knocked outen him. I'm an ole rustler from taw, cap'n, once riled up."

"If it's fight you want and will have, you shall not be disappointed," said the captain, determined to try the game of bluff upon the hunter and his friend.

Hitherto, the young bee-hunters had remained quiet, but when their comrades seemed in a fair way of getting into trouble, they adjusted their weapons and stood ready for the fray.

The odds were in favor of the sheriff's party, and it was this that made them more determined and outspoken in their conduct. There were eight of his party, and only five of Goliah's; and every man of the former was better armed than the latter.

To Goliah it was evident, from the first, that they had come there prepared for a row. Their very looks and ill-guided feelings told him this. He was well enough satisfied that the sheriff was a gigantic fraud, improvised for that occasion by Spencer and Trimble, who felt that the big hunter was a thorn in their sides. He knew they must have got wind of his business there in the pineries, or else mistrusted that he was in some way connected with an element adverse to their success and interest.

Goliah entertained some doubts of their ability to cope with the sheriff's party, and in case they should become engaged, he knew some one must die. He could see no way to avert bloodshed unless it was to accede to the enemy's demands, and in the very last extremity of hope, Old Wolverine came to the rescue in gallant style.

"Now, gentlemen," he said, "if it's fight you will have, I'm going to make it warm for you," and turning he gave a sharp whistle.

The next instant his dogs were bounding to his side, and a word to them seemed to place them in an attitude of hostility. Old Baltic's bristles became erect, and he showed his teeth and uttered a growl as sullen and ferocious as a bear. The other dogs began walking around their master, evincing a restless impatience.

Hero was an enemy that Spencer and his men had overlooked; and the ferocious appearance of the bull-dog, Old Baltic, inspired every one of them with more fear than did the old hunter himself. In fact, the captain saw at once that they had a more formidable enemy in the dogs than the men.

Goliah saw an expression of surprise upon the faces of his enemies, and he at once felt easier. He knew the tables had been turned.

"If fight it is, capt'in, I'm ready to let slip my pups of war," said Old Wolverine; "you can see that Baltic's ready, and I tell ye, men, he's a rip-roarin' ole equipepus. I've see'd him jerk a man's jugular cl'ar from the very end o' his toes, and craunch up bone and all. This is a holy fact, and if ye want to take yer chances in a skirmish, advance yer pickets, and balance on the corner."

"We have no desire to provoke unnecessary bloodshed," replied Spencer, gravitating in the opposite direction; "you are all invoking the penalty of the law by resisting its officer; and my advice is for Mr. Strong to give up quietly and escape the punishment of a double offense."

"Oh-ah!" exclaimed Old Wolverine, "then you don't propose to combat any, eh? Wal, I don't keer myself—only I hate to disappoint my pups. I presume, Goliah, if we git a fight cu'en these men we'll have to assume the offensive, and advance our lines."

"We want no fight—no fight, gentlemen," said the sheriff; "but you will find that the laws of Michigan cannot be disregarded with impunity."

With these words the agent of the law turned upon his heel and walked away, followed by Spencer and the rest of his posse.

"Boys," said Old Wolverine, the moment they were out of sight and hearing, "we had better charge our quarters. They've got a grudge against Goliah for some reason or other, and when they come again it 'll be in force."

"I suggest it at we retire to our late camp on the river," said Frank, "for those stolen papers are buried down there."

"Indeed! Witches and warlocks! then let's git outen this at once," exclaimed Wolverine, "afore a sly bullet sends some o' us over the hills."

In a minute's time all were ready to depart. Old Wolverine took the lead and they moved rapidly away through the woods, going north. When they again came to a halt it was in the same camp deserted by them a few hours previous. The smoldering embers of their fire were still there, and in a few minutes a cheerful light lit up the surrounding gloom.

"Now let the Unknown Marksman or Sheriff Macklin find us, if they please," said Old Wolverine.

"I see that I have got to act with dispatch," said Goliah Strong, "for Spencer and Trimble are beginning to scent danger. First, I want to visit Old Cranberry's cabin, then I must explore Camp Spencer for further evidence of its being the retreat of a gang of counterfeiters. The money won from Spencer by Old Wolverine the other night at the Points is, every dollar of it, counterfeit. Now, Frank, if you have the secret of this paper solved, let us all know what it is," and he took the paper from his pocket and passed it to young Ballard.

Frank sat down and his friends gathered around him, their faces betraying their intense curiosity.

"You all think," he said, "that some of the writing has been torn off of each end of this paper; but such is not the case. It is a cipher letter, and the way I discovered its secret was this: while studying it over, I involuntarily folded the lower end of the paper backward, this way, along the lower edge of the map, and he illustrated the same by repeating the act. "Then I folded the upper end of the paper back along the upper margin of the map, this way. That, you see, leaves nothing but the map next to you; but turn the opposite side to you, and you find that the torn ends of the paper fit exactly together, and the secret is plain to be read. There it is," and he turned the paper and revealed the following:

on the main
black river between the
mouth of the north and
south branches there is
a sharp bend and in
that bend the papers
is buried under a
oak tree in a tin box
may god help you to
find them
Thomas Thoms.

"By heavens," burst from Goliah's lips as Frank read aloud the secret, "it is an ingenious document—Thomas Thoms was no fool after all. Nattie, allow me to congratulate you—in the bend between the mouth of the north and south Black rivers, the paper says. Boys! we are encamped in that bend this blessed minute!"

"Ay, Goliah!" exclaimed Old Wolverine; "we're not a hundred jumps from the very spot where the papers are buried. Say the word, and I'll run down to the Five Points for a spade to begin the search early cock-crow to-morrow morning."

"I'll go with you," said Ed Mathews, and in a few minutes' time the two were on their way to the Five Points.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MRS. ZANE'S VISITORS.

AFTER his failure to capture Goliah Strong, Captain Spencer returned to camp, furious with rage. He slept but little that night, for something like a presentiment of coming danger had unstrung his nerves and disturbed his peace of mind.

Early the next morning he went over to the cabin of the old cranberry-picker to make some further arrangements for his marriage with pretty Ida Zane.

He did not remain over an hour at the cabin, and as he bowed himself out at the door he discovered two Indian squaws in dirty red blankets laid at the foot of the hill and beach their canoe—a tiny bark craft of elaborate workmanship.

"I say, Ida," he said, turning and addressing the maiden, "you are to have company—a couple of ladies from Alleghan."

He then turned and moved on toward the landing. On the way he met the blanketed squaws, who stepped aside for him to pass; and as he did so he threw out one of his booted feet and tripped the foremost squaw up. With a groan she fell heavily upon the earth.

With an outburst of brutal laughter the villain passed on, and reaching the water's edge stepped into the Indians' canoe, to which he had taken a fancy, and seating himself paddled away down the stream.

The squaws moved on to the cabin. They approached the door shyly. Ida and her mother were very indifferent as to their presence, for

begging squaws called frequently at the home of the cranberry-pickers.

Ida met them at the door and demanded:

"What do you want to-day?"

"Nothing but rest," replied one, in pure English, and in a sweet, musical tone that not only surprised our heroine, but at once appealed directly to her kind young heart.

"Come in, then," Ida said, leading the way into the cabin.

Chairs were given the women, but before seating themselves they threw aside their greasy blankets revealing garbs that were of some fine texture, and fitting their forms neatly. Hoops of gold encircled their arms and wrists, and jewels flashed in their raven tresses. Neither of them possessed features at all characteristic of their race; and one of them spoke such pure English that Ida and her mother at once mistrusted them of being white women in disguise, come there to inquire into their secluded life.

"Where do you live?" Ida inquired of them, after they had been seated.

"At Alleghan," was the answer of the elder squaw.

"What are your names?"

"My name is Maneelah, and that of my sister Summer-Rose. She is the daughter of Pokah-Gan, and the flower of the tribe."

"You speak my language well," said Ida to Maneelah.

"I have lived all my days with the white people. Many of them dwell at Alleghan, the home of the Pottawatomies. Moreover, my husband is a pale-face."

"Then you are a married woman?"

"I was," she answered, with a sigh.

"I presume, then, your husband is dead."

"In one sense of the word he is."

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Zane, puzzled by the woman's answer.

"He no longer loves me," she spoke, figuratively.

"Where is he now?"

"I know not. He left here a few minutes ago."

"Whom do you mean?" exclaimed Mrs. Zane.

"Randolph Spencer!" was the startling answer.

A cry of surprise burst from Mrs. Zane's lips.

"Woman! you are uttering a falsehood!" she cried.

"I speak the truth; Randolph Spencer is my lawful husband, and yet he would marry that innocent child," said the squaw, pointing to Ida, while her eyes fairly blazed with the fire of pent-up emotions; "we were concealed under some drooping willows in our canoe when her young lover left her yesterday. We heard Randolph Spencer come to her and abuse her for permitting her gallant boy-lover to kiss her."

"Oh, my God!" cried Mrs. Zane, wringing her hands in grief, "when will my troubles be over?"

"You, too, then, have had a life of trouble?" the Indian woman said, inquiringly.

"Yes, yes, it is woman's lot to suffer."

"It seems so," replied Maneelah; "years ago mine began when I was young and light-hearted as your pretty daughter. I was forced to marry Spencer by a cruel, selfish guardian, who thought more of gold than human happiness. I soon hated Spencer with all the intensity of my soul, because I loved another. And Spencer, soon tiring of me, deserted me; and then I was almost alone in the cold, cruel world which held but little sympathy for the discarded wife. But, thank God, I had a kind and loving brother who took me to his far-off frontier home, and there I lived for years in seclusion and quietude. Were his desertion of me the only crime of which he was guilty I could easily forgive him, because I knew I could not be what a wife should be to him, and at the same time love another."

"Then he has other crimes resting upon his soul?" said Mrs. Zane.

"I believe although I am not certain, that the curse of Cain rests upon his soul. He had a half-brother named Randolph Spencer—his own name being Henry Mount. These brothers favored each other so closely that one was often mistaken for the other. Many times have I heard Henry Mount, my husband, make the remark that if Randolph should suddenly disappear he could pass himself as the missing man, and at the same time declare that it was Henry that was missing. After I had been in my frontier home awhile the news came to my ears that Henry Mount had been found dead in the river, and everything went to show that he had been murdered. I thought at the time of what Henry had often said, and knowing that Randolph was very wealthy I wondered if Henry had dealt foully with him. Time went on and the first thing I knew I heard that one Randolph Spencer and James Trimble had purchased a large tract of timber-land on the South Black river, and with a large force of workmen had commenced chopping and rafting. I wondered if it was the Randolph Spencer whom I had once known, and waited a long while before I got to see him.

The squaws moved on to the cabin. They approached the door shyly. Ida and her mother were very indifferent as to their presence, for

One day he passed through our settlement on a hunting excursion and I got a glimpse of him; but for my life I couldn't tell whether it was Henry or Randolph. My general impression, however, was that it was Randolph; and if so, I felt certain that Henry had murdered him and then taken his brother's name. The uncertainty of this identity preyed upon my mind day and night; and I finally resolved to end the suspense and doubt I was laboring under by ascertaining the facts in the case. I knew that if it was Henry living he was imitating all the peculiarities of his brother to a wonderful degree of success; and there was but one thing about Henry by which I could identify him beyond doubt. This was a large scar extending across the cheek and throat where he had been wounded in a drunken row the year he and I were married."

"Nearly a year ago, I, in company with a friend, descended the Black river, and one night paddled our canoe over and landed on a large raft upon which Spencer was known to be. Watching my chances, for it was very dark and dangerous footing on the raft, I stole forward and when the captain sat bolt upright in a half-drunken stupor, I walked into the tent and carefully raising his long beard, saw the telltale scar upon his throat. He was Henry Mount, and not Randolph Spencer; and this very fact convinces me that he murdered his brother for his property, then left that country and came here, hoping to escape identification. This, my friends, is the truth, though it is not all of which Henry Mount is guilty. I tell you this much that you may escape the monster's clutches."

"Ah! I see you are not an Indian," said Mrs. Zane, greatly excited.

"No; I am a white woman, as you can see," she replied, revealing a bosom of snowy whiteness. "My name is Edith Mount."

"Does he know that you are living?" Ida asked, her eyes swimming in tears of both joy and pity.

"He did know it a few evenings ago, though he supposed I was dead—a victim of another foul murder of his; and when he discovered I was living, he attempted to kill me again. He fired at me, inflicting a severe wound in the breast from which I am now suffering. When that same inhuman monster tripped me up a few minutes ago, under the impression that I was an old squaw, the fall hurt me very much."

"Oh, poor, persecuted soul!" cried Mrs. Zane; "you have saved my child from ruin and death, for in two days more she would have been wedded to that villain!"

"I learned some time ago, through a friend, that he was paying respects to a young girl here; and it was to warn her that I came to the Blue Marsh to-day."

"God bless you!" exclaimed the mother, and falling upon her knees she clasped the hands of Edith, while her white lips moved in a prayer of thanks to Him who sees the fall of every sparrow, and holds the destiny of each soul in the hollow of His hand.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A LIVELY RACE.

BUT little sleep came to the eyes of Goliah Strong and his friends, after Old Wolverine and one of the bee-hunters left camp for the Five Points. Thoughts of the restoration of his father's fortune kept Nattie Darrall awake, restless and impatient. Goliah was calm, thoughtful and watchful, for he could not dismiss all fears of danger from his mind.

Morning at length dawned, and after breaking on wild turkey, Goliah said:

"Boys, it will be noon or after before Wolverine and Ed return; and as we can do nothing here, suppose we make a flying visit over to the Blue Marsh? We have no time to lose."

"I'm in for it!" exclaimed Nattie, eagerly.

"Anything will suit me," said Frank Ballard.

Goliah took a slip of paper from his pocket, and with a pencil wrote their intention upon it and then pinned the same to the tree under which they were encamped, that Wolverine and Ed might know where they were, should the two return from the Points before they came back from the marsh. This done, they took their departure.

About noon Old Wolverine and Ed Mathews returned from the Points with the spade; but were astonished to find their friends had deserted camp, and from all appearances, hours before. Goliah's notice, however, did not escape their eyes, and when Ed had read it, all fears subsided.

"They'll not be back before night, Ed," Old Wolverine said; "if Goliah goes up thar and finds that woman his wife, and that gal, Ida, his darter, he'll not leave thar right away, that's my 'pinion. I wouldn't, you may bet."

"Well, why can't we begin the search for those Darrall papers?" Ed asked.

"We can, if you remember the instructions."

"I remember every word: 'under an oak tree in the bend between the mouth of the

North and South Black rivers,' is what the paper said."

"Then come along," said Wolverine, and with his rifle upon his shoulder and the spade under his arm, the two set off through the woods.

They penetrated to the river, searching the forest carefully as they advanced. They moved up and down the stream, keeping within speaking distance apart. For an hour they searched the bend over and over, and Ed had begun to despair of finding the tree, when suddenly he was startled by a low whistle from Wolverine.

Peering through the dense woods, he saw the old hunter beckoning him toward him, and crossing over to where he stood under a great oak, he was greeted with the exclamation:

"Eureka! Eureka!"

Ed jerked off his hat and would have uttered a shout of joy, had Wolverine not enjoined silence upon him.

"Thar may be enemies lurkin' about," he said; "moreover, the box may not be under this tree, and a feller'd better not holler till out o' the woods. But from 'pearances, I should think this war the spot. Thar is a kind of a sink in the ground which looks as though the dirt had settled; and thar on the tree you can see the lark has been blazed off some time ago."

These marks were all very plain, and since the tree was the only oak of any size that they had found, there was not much doubt of its being the one alluded to in Thom's paper. So divesting himself of his rifle and accouterments, Wolverine began digging around the sunken spot previously mentioned. He had not taken out more than half a dozen shovel-fulls of dirt when, lo! and behold! he turned up a small box covered with black rust.

"That's it! that's it!" exclaimed Ed, stooping, and taking up the box in his hands.

Wolverine dropped the spade, and together he and Ed examined the box carefully over. The lid was rusted fast, and in several places the rust had eaten through the tin. They had no difficulty in breaking the box open, and when they did so a package rolled up in a newspaper fell out.

Ed opened the bundle, and found the Darrall papers in a good state of preservation, though quite damp and musty. He glanced over the writing and signatures, and when assured that they were the right papers, he wrapped them in the broken box. At this very juncture a voice, stern and deadly, exclaimed:

"Drop that box where you stand, or die!"

Ed started with a cry of horror, and lifting his eyes, he beheld the muzzle of a rifle thrust through a clump of bushes near, and a deadly eye blazing down the barrel. The face and form of the man was concealed; but there was no disguising the voice. It was that of Jim Trimble.

Old Wolverine was already covered from danger by the trunk of the great oak, and, acting upon the spur of the moment, Ed leaped to one side as quick as a flash, and placed a tree between himself and the muzzle of the assassin's gun. Trimble fired, but a second too late, whereupon Old Wolverine drew his revolver, and reaching around the tree, began firing rapidly, though at random, upon the enemy.

The latter returned the fire, one or two bullets cutting close to Wolverine's hand.

When the old hunter had emptied the last chamber of his revolver, he turned and whistled for his dogs that were out in the woods near. As old Baltic came lumbering up from the river, where he had been wallowing in the water, the sound of retreating footsteps was heard on the other side, and peeping around the tree, the hunter saw Trimble and the late Sheriff Maclin running off at the top of their speed.

The dogs had again put them to flight.

"Now, Ed," said the old borderman, "is our time, so let's peg out for tall timber. Thar's no denying the fact that Trimble, one of the signers of those notes and the mortgage in that box, knows that they are in our possession. They will move heaven and earth, and ransack hell and fury to find us. Come along, Ed, for thar they come in force—more than twenty o' them! It's no use making a stand; they're too many for the Old Guard. Here we go, like a scootin' brace of meteors."

Wolverine and Ed, the latter with the box under one arm, and his rifle under the other, took to their heels, and with all their speed fled up the river.

Trimble, followed by a score of lumbermen and gamblers of South Haven, pursued them—yelling like demons, and firing their guns and revolvers at random. Bullets whistled and rattled through the shrubbery like hail—many of them passing uncomfortably near to the heads of the fugitives.

The latter soon reached the river, then turned and sped along the shore. Trimble and his men, following close behind, shouted lustily for them to halt, their commands being accompanied by oaths and threats of the most horrible kind.

"Drop that box!" yelled Trimble, "or, by the gods, we will give you no quarter."

"The devil'll give you quarters in a warm corner," replied Old Wolverine.

"Wolverine," cried Ed, "they're gaining upon us rapidly."

"Mebby we can dodge them up here and git over onto Castle Island. Keep a stiff upper-lip, Ed, and hoe it down lively. If them critters git a hold on us they'll be apt to snatch us bald."

"Carry my rifle a moment, then," said Ed.

Wolverine dropped back, and taking Mathews's rifle, again dashed on ahead. He had gone but a few paces when he heard something splash in the water, a little behind him, and glancing back over his shoulder, he saw, to his surprise and horror, that the young bee-hunter had thrown the box into the river.

"My great Lord, boy!" he exclaimed, turning upon the youth, his eyes flashing with indignation, "what in fury did you throw that away fur? Now all is lost—see, the box is floating, and the demons will have it, papers and all."

Ed glanced back and saw that the box had fallen with the open side up, and was floating slowly away at the will of the current.

A yell of triumph burst from the lips of the pursuers, for they saw the desperate act of the fugitive to conceal the papers.

"Go on, Wolverine," said Ed, excitedly; "let us save our lives; never mind the papers. I have them safe in my pocket—I only threw the box away in hopes of deceiving our pursuers."

"Oh, you did!" exclaimed Wolverine; "well now, that war dogged cute in you, youngster, for it'll be apt to give us a long lead."

They ran on and soon discovered that Ed's ruse was working successfully. Trimble and his men had stopped on the shore opposite the floating box; and by the time that they had found it was empty, the fugitives were a quarter of a mile ahead.

"Now let's make for Castle Island," said Wolverine; "if that hidden bridge is still thar, we can keep Satan and his host at bay when once over on the island. Come along, Josie," and he dashed off a-whistling.

"But how'll we git off?" asked Ed.

"We'll manage that some way," said Wolverine.

They ran on until they reached the Rapids, when Wolverine made a hasty examination of the condition of the wire foot-bridge. Finding it still in position, he crossed over to the is and and signaled for Ed to follow by striking upon the wire hand-railing.

In a few minutes they were safely landed upon the island; but they were not a minute too soon. Trimble and his men were close behind.

Our friends hastily ascended the side of the little island, and sought shelter from the bullets of their excited and exasperated pursuers behind the ridge; yet maintaining a position where they could watch the island and those upon it. They felt certain that they had treed their game, and that its capture was only a matter of time. They knew there was but one way of getting to and from the island, for Spencer had explained the whole secret of the foot-bridge to them; and this Trimble resolved to guard until hunger drove the fugitives ashore, or until they surrendered those papers.

Old Wolverine and Ed now had an opportunity to reflect upon their situation; and although they found it secure enough at the time, it promised nothing very flattering for the future.

While talking the matter over, they were suddenly started by the sound of footsteps behind them; and glancing around they were completely astonished to see two men approaching them. One of them was Obed Smiley, a teacher of Mennonite faith, whom, it will doubtless be remembered, we met once at the Five Points. The other was none other than Sandy Gray, the mail-carrier. Both were armed, and neither seemed aware of our two friends' presence until they were almost upon them. Then Wolverine was the first to speak:

"Hullo, here! that you, Sandy Gray and Obed Smiley?" he exclaimed, raising himself from the ground.

"Yes, sir'ee, bossfly; this are me, Sandy Gray, U. S. M. C., Esq.," replied that worthy.

"And this is me, friend Wolverine, plain Obed Smiley, of Barkopolis," replied the Mennonite, though he appeared somewhat embarrassed by his sudden surprise.

"It strikes me, Obed, you're losing your faith; I see you carry a rifle," observed Wolverine, facetiously.

"Verily, friend Wolverine, the devil himself couldn't keep his faith in this abominable country," was the peacemaker's reply.

"Very true, Obed; your cranium's about level on that; but do you know the pre-dica-

mint that we be in? that we're jugged by a pack of freebooters?"

"Thee has jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire, I should think," answered Obed.

"That's it, prezactly; now can ye tell me how we are goin' to git outen this—back into the pan?"

"Yes; the best way you can," was the laconic reply.

"Thank you!" replied Wolverine, sarcastically.

"Obed is given to jokin' a great deal," said Sandy, "but I'll bet he'll git you fellers cuten here slicker'n a greased eel. That's Obed Smiley to a gnat's heel."

"Then Obed is at home here," said Ed.

"Never thee mind, young man," replied Obed; "when night comes I will take thee safely ashore where thy enemies will not harm thee."

"But the approaches to the castle are guarded, and it'll be impossible to scale the walls or swim the moat," said Wolverine.

"Never thee mind, I say; when darkness comes I will set thee ashore," declared Obed.

And when darkness did come the mysterious Obed Smiley kept his word, and took the two fugitives ashore by way of a secret passage opening on the west side of the island.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A FAMILY REUNION.

GOLIAB STRONG, Frank Ballard and Nattie Darrall pushed rapidly in the direction of the Blue Marsh after breaking camp on the Black river. A few hours' walking brought them to the top of an eminence from whence they could command a wide view of the great marsh and country beyond.

They saw the cabin nestled down among the pines, and the creek, that looked like a band of silver crossing the marsh, sparkling in the summer sun. No life was visible about the cabin, but upon the creek two canoes, with three or four occupants each, were moving up the stream.

"Hal!" exclaimed Goliab, "one of them is Captain Spencer. I wonder where they can be going?"

"To the cabin of the cranberry-picker, I presume," answered Frank.

"They may go on past," said Nattie; "but as sure as they stop at the cabin, I'll think there is something unusual going on there."

"And, look over yonder in the marsh," said Goliab, his keen, restless eye fixed upon a moving object; "what is that moving along so brisk among the bushes?"

"It appears to be a man," responded Nattie; "but I can't see what he's skulking around cut there for."

"I see he carries a rifle; he may be following a deer," said Frank.

"Be that as it may," replied Strong, "I see Spencer and his men have landed and gone up to the terryman's house."

"Then let us be moving," added young Darrall, "for I'm afraid their visit there 'odes no good to the family of the old berry-picker."

They descended the hill and moved up the creek until opposite the cabin, when they came to a halt. Unfortunately, there was not a canoe on their side of the stream; but this difficulty was soon obviated by Nattie, who, doffing his clothes, swam over to the opposite side, and boarding a canoe, quickly returned. As soon as he had donned his clothing, the three crossed over and landed upon the island.

The trees skirting the creek where they touched the island hid them from view of those at the cabin; and when ready to advance, Goliab Strong said:

"I believe I will wait here, boys, until you have examined the situation. I do not desire to go to the cabin just yet; though, if you should meet with any trouble call me."

"All right," replied Nattie; and he and Frank started toward the cabin.

Goliab Strong, with his rifle under his arm, began pacing up and down the creek in mental deliberation. His eyes were bent downward, though now and then he would glance slyly and longingly toward the cabin. Ten minutes had thus passed when he was suddenly started by the sound of footsteps, and looking up he found himself face to face with a woman; and that woman was his own wife!

"Margery! Oh, my own darling Margery!" the great man cried, dropping his gun and advancing toward the pale, sad-faced woman.

"Ambrose!" was the only word that escaped the lips of the woman we have known as Mrs. Zane, as she fell fainting in the arms of her husband.

Goliab imprinted kiss after kiss upon her white, unconscious cheeks, while tears of joy chased down his bearded face. Then he lifted the inanimate form in his arms, and carrying it down to the water's edge, bathed the white brow and throbbing temples. Gradually the almost extinguished spark was rekindled, and Margery Belmont recovered her consciousness, murmuring the name of him who beat over her.

Silence sealed their lips for some moments after her recovery, so completely were they

overwhelmed with emotions of joy and surprise; though a sense of each other's feelings formed a silent conversation that tongue could not express—it was that strange language of the heart.

Goliah Strong, as we will continue to call the big detective for the present, was the first to break the silence of that blissful moment, and open a conversation that lasted for nearly an hour. We will not attempt to repeat what was said, nor describe the infinite joy of that meeting after ten long years of cruel separation. The reader already knows the cause of their parting, as narrated by Goliah himself.

Had the same words been spoken ten years ago they now uttered; had the same feeling of heart been manifested, they could have escaped those years of misery and sorrow. But Margery acted from a sense of fear and shame, and under the impulse of the moment she fled that her husband might never reproach her for crimes of which she was as innocent as an unborn babe. Her enemy, or rather her husband's enemy, had so effectually turned the finger of public scorn against her that the very sight of a friend filled her soul with fear and hatred of the whole world; and it was only the love which she bore her child and father that ever prevented her from filling a suicide's grave. Thus the falsehood of an enemy and her own rash act of desertion cost years and years of measureless woe. She concealed herself so carefully from the world that she had never heard of the death of her slanderer, and his confession of her innocence until she heard it from the lips of her husband. A cry of joy burst from her lips when he told her; the cloud that had so long obscured her happiness rolled away, and the sunlight of a new life burst upon her heart.

In a few brief words she told him how, with her old father, they had lived under assumed names in the Blue Marsh, waiting only upon the wheel of time to decide their fate.

"Then that little fairy who calls herself Ida Zane is our child?" Goliah remarked.

"Yes, our little Zoe, Ambrose," the happy wife replied, lifting her eyes to his.

"I thought she favored my Margery very much; and the moment I saw her something told me she was my child. I finally learned through Nattie Darrall that there were books in your cabin with the name of Ambrose Belmont in them; and then I knew I had found my lost darlings."

"Poor little Ida, she is—but I am ashamed to tell you, Ambrose, for fear you will be angry."

"No, no, Margery; nothing shall ever come between our happiness again. Speak out; what of my little Zoe?"

"She was to have been married to-day."

"Married?" exclaimed the father, "my child married? Great God forbid! she is but a child!"

"I know it, Ambrose," the wife sobbed, bitterly; "but father is getting very old, and I knew he would not last much longer. I felt that with him gone we would be helpless in this cruel world, and so I was desirous of seeing Ida in a permanent home of her own."

"To whom is she to be married?"

"Captain Randolph Spencer."

"My God! that monstrous villain! Why, Margery, I, a Government detective, have a pair of handcuffs in my pocket for that man. He is the most notorious villain that ever went unhung!"

"I know it, Ambrose, I found it out yesterday. He already has a wife—she is here now to confront him; and I came out here to quiet my aching throbbing brain and think over what I should tell him when we met. He is at the cabin now. He came just as I left."

"My dear Margery," said her husband, "I will relieve you of your trouble. I will speak for you. Ah! yonder comes Zoe, our little angel girl."

Ida came walking briskly down the green, wooded slope looking for her mother. When she came suddenly upon her and the big hunter she started back amazed; but her mother promptly relieved her of all fears by saying:

"Come here, Ida; come, child, and greet your father, Ambrose Belmont, of whom I have told you so often."

Ida was completely dumbfounded. For a moment she seemed undecided whether to flee or advance; but finally mastering her emotions she approached her father who, kneeling, received her childish, impassioned caresses.

Ida and her mother both wept with joy, and Goliah, rising to his feet, held his child at arm's length and gazing fondly into her sweet young face wept and laughed by turns. Then he folded both wife and daughter to his throbbing heart and muttered a prayer of thanks. His cup of joy was running over. He felt that the sorrows and troubles of the past had been fully repaid by the infinite joy of that reunion.

CHAPTER XXX.

WHO WAS THE UNKNOWN MARKSMAN?

With Ida upon one side and her mother upon the other, Goliah Strong finally turned to-

ward the cabin. As they slowly ascended the hill, he asked:

"Is Spencer's wife not afraid to confront him if he has attempted to murder her before?"

"She says she is not—that she defies him now. She claims that an invisible, yet earthly power, is watching over her," replied Mrs. Belmont.

"What can that power be?"

"I have no idea whatever, Ambrose. I am sure we knew nothing of the coming of any one but Spencer and his friends."

"Well, we will doubtless know soon what she meant; but I see the captain and his friends, and my two friends, have adjourned to the open air, and are reclining under the trees in front of the house," and Goliah, peering through an opening in the foliage, scrutinized each man closely. "Perhaps," he continued, "I had better approach the cabin alone, Margery, for fear the captain takes the alarm. He is talking and laughing like a gay young cavalier."

"Very well, husband; then Ida and I will go on to the house," replied Margery, and then she and Ida went on to the cabin, their faces radiant with joy.

A few minutes later Goliah Strong joined the party lounging on the green grass beneath the umbrageous pines.

Captain Spencer evinced some surprise at his presence there at that time, though he endeavored to conceal his emotion in a pleasant and well-affected tone. But Goliah took little pains to conceal his dislike and contempt for the villain he knew him to be, and addressed his remarks to Frank and Nattie, as well as Spencer's friends, in such a way as to almost ignore the presence of the captain.

They had conversed a few minutes longer, when another person—a sanctimonious-looking gentleman—came from the cabin and joined them. Nearly all recognized him as the missionary stationed at Alleghan.

"Captain Spencer," he said, addressing that gentleman as though no others were present, "I am very sorry, indeed, to be compelled to say that I cannot solemnize your marriage with Miss Ida Zane."

Spencer's face grew white and red by turns, and a look of indignation flashed in his cold, cruel eyes as he replied:

"What reasons have you for saying this?"

"Very good reasons—yea, grave reasons, sir; I am informed that you already have a wife living."

"It's a lie!" exclaimed the captain, growing purple in the face; "I had a wife, but she is dead!"

"Oh, no, Henry, she is not dead," said a voice behind him, and Edith Mount stepped from behind an evergreen and confronted him—brave, fearless and wondrously beautiful in her defiance and triumph; "you made a very poor shot, Henry. I was only wounded."

Captain Spencer glared upon her with blazing eyes; his teeth became set; his fists clenched, and his very soul seemed transformed into that of a demon of rage and mad fury.

Edith, calm and self-possessed, and conscious of her power and triumph, stood proudly before him as if inviting, *daring* him to repeat his oft-attempted acts of violence. But he seemed perfectly powerless to act; he regained his power of speech, however, and in the tone of a coward replied:

"Woman!—devil, what are you to me? You are no wife of mine. You are an adventuress—a vile!"

"Hold your tongue, Spencer!" cried Frank Ballard, indignantly; "you are talking to a woman, sir, and you shall not insult her!" and he rose to his feet.

"Hal! you are her self-constituted protector, I presume?" sneered Spencer; "very likely that gentleman coming yonder is another of her admirers."

The person alluded to was an Indian; and it required no second glance to tell the assembly that it was Running Deer, the mail-carrier. On his shoulder he carried his double-barreled rifle, and under his arm his mail-bag.

"It strikes me," said Goliah Strong, as he came up, "that you are getting off your track, are you not, Running Deer?"

"Running Deer knows where he treads," answered the Indian, in a tone greatly at variance with his usual taciturnity, as he stopped in front of the crowd and leaned his gun against a tree, and hung his mail-bag on a limb. "I have come," he continued, after a moment's pause, "as the bearer of news to all here—news that will make many wonder. Will all listen to what I have to tell?"

"Yes! yes!" was the general response, and all sat down upon the green sward to hear his story. Not all, either, for Captain Spencer remained standing, or rather leaning, against a tree, his arms crossed and his face wearing a frowning look, sullen as a thunder-cloud. A storm of passion was brewing within his breast.

A deep silence fell upon the crowd.

It was broken by Running Deer, who began:

"There are no doubt many happy people today; and all that are not happy would like to

be. Running Deer was happy once, for he had a dusky bride fair as any in all the tribes of the north-west. We lived in a cabin, as the white man lives, in the valley of the Muskegon. In the day, I labored hard with my red and white friends, cutting logs in the woods for the mills on the great lake; and when the night came, my child played at my feet and my wife sung to me and I forgot my weariness. We had all learned to read and write, and so looked beyond the narrow limits of the red man's life into the great world of knowledge. We were happy—very happy. Five other families lived in our settlement. Some of the men were white with Indian wives; but all were good and happy. We lifted our hands against no one, for we considered all our brothers. We loved our women because they were good, kind helpmeets. We had preaching once a month in our settlement, and all had learned to worship God. We passed laws for self-protection as white men did, and we wrote them upon papers. One of the laws read: 'If any man insults or offers to insult the wife or daughter of his neighbor, or of any one entitled to respect, he shall receive not less than one hundred nor more than one hundred and fifty lashes for the first offense; and double that amount for the second.' The object in this was to compel respect for woman, such as the Indian never has for his wife.

"One day, years ago, a great white man—a man of whom you'd think better—came to the Bullrush settlement, as we called our place, and asked for bread and meat to feed his dogs. The woman told him kindly that she had none to spare and expressed her regrets at having to refuse him. He called her a liar, then struck her over the shoulders with his riding-whip, and even kicked her. We all became enraged at this brutal insult; we caught the man, gave him a trial and sentenced him to receive fifty lashes on the naked back—but half the lawful penalty. But because he was a great man we showed him some leniency."

Here Running Deer paused, almost choked down by his emotions. Goliah Strong noticed that Captain Spencer was also moved by the Indian's words; but it was not by emotions of sorrow—it was the most malicious and demoniac spirit of savage vengeance that ever sat upon human countenance.

In a moment the Indian continued:

"We punished the white man for his cowardly treatment of our neighbor's wife, and it would have been better for many had the penalty been death. Months went by, and we all supposed the matter was forgotten. We built a great dam across the stream by the Bullrush settlement to aid in floating our logs down to the big river when the water was low and the current feeble. There were fish in our river, and upon this was our chief dependence for food. We fished with rod and line, and every few nights after our day's work was done, we took our women and children and went out on the river in boats to fish. One night when the moon shone bright, and the stars were cut all over the summer sky, we went out to fish below the dam. Our women and children were with us as usual. Two men were away from home at the time, but their families accompanied us on the water. We left our lamps burning in our cabins, and our cattle in their sheds. The night was a glorious one, and we were all happy and joyous. Our children made merry in ripples of laughter, and our wives sung the traditional songs of our forefathers' love. As if attracted by the scene of love and song the fish came around us in abundance; and our wants were nearly all supplied when we heard a splash in the water, and a friend of ours, who dwelt in the camp of some white lumbermen, swam out to us and told us to flee—that death was near. But it was too late. Nine men—one of them the man we had punished for striking our neighbor's wife—came suddenly and with their united strength tore open the floodgates of the Bullrush dam and buried an avalanche of water, logs and debris upon us. The friend who came to warn us, that woman who was living with her brother, Edith Mount, and myself were all that escaped—the others were all drowned; and even our Indian friend died in a few days of injuries received that night, and so Edith and I were the only two that survived the flood. I found the body of my wife and child next day far down the river where the cruel torrent had thrown them upon the bank."

"The two friends that were away at the time of the tragedy, came home to find their wives and children gone—all dead and blistering in the sun along the Black river. The terrible news almost killed them, for they loved their families. One of them was the brother of Edith. Our sorrow was more than human nature could bear and finally turned to vengeance, and we resolved to punish the destroyers of our homes. We knew every man of them, for the friend who came to warn us told me after the flood, and before he died, their names. Most of them were Canadians and Indian half-breeds—born outlaws, you might say, without whom the world would be better off. As I was an unerring shot I became the chief actor in the terrible drama. Like an evil

spirit have I followed these men. I engaged to carry the mail to Allghan that no one might mistrust my designs of revenge; and whenever one of the doomed men crossed my path, I shot him down."

"By Judas!" exclaimed a lumberman, "then you are the Unknown Marksman?"

"I am!" was the firm response.

Captain Spencer started, pale, nervous and terrified. His brain grew dizzy, and his hand trembled.

"Who would ever have thought such a meek soul as Running Deer was the Destroyer?" said Goliah, glancing over the crowd of astounded men.

"I have played my part well," said the Indian, "and with the help of my friends have I wreaked a bloody revenge on the inhuman devils. But one of them still lives; and that is the man we punished for striking our neighbor's wife. He is before you. It is *that* man."

He raised his finger and pointed it toward Captain Spencer, his eyes glowing with an unearthly light. Spencer, like the coward he was, seemed ready to sink into the earth. He was appalled by the Indian's revelation, for he believed every soul of the Bullrush settlement had perished in the awful flood that he and his companions had hurled upon them. Recovering his speech, however, he replied with a savage emphasis:

"Running Deer, you are a liar!"

"I know whereof I speak," the Indian said, taking up his rifle, "and with my vengeance fully glutted I am ready to join my wife and child in the happy hunting-grounds."

Before any one could interfere, he threw the muzzle of his gun forward and glancing along the barrel, shot Captain Spencer dead! Then he set his gun down, calmly folded his arms across his breast and turned toward the crowd. The next instant he fell dead, himself, riddled by a dozen bullets from the revolvers of the captain's men.

And thus perished the Unknown Marksman!

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE CLOUDS DISPELLED.

RUNNING DEER was the last person any one would ever have suspected of being the terror of the Black river—the Unknown Marksman; and his confession and the tragedy that followed created the wildest excitement in front of the old berry-picker's cabin.

The lumbermen became greatly enraged over the death of their leader, and finding nothing but the body of Running Deer upon which to vent their spite, they finally made ominous threats against Edith Mount, accusing her of being an accomplice of the avenger's. But here Goliah Strong and his friends interfered and gave the infuriated men to understand that they would resent any insult offered the woman, at the cost of their lives.

This proved an unexpected check to their unbridled fury, and with direful mutterings against the big hunter and all his friends, they finally departed for Camp Spencer with the body of their chief.

The body of Running Deer was interred upon the island with some ceremony, and thus a funeral, instead of a wedding, had been the event of that memorable day on the Blue Marsh.

Curiosity led our friends to examine the clumsy-looking double-barreled rifle that the red mail-carrier had possessed. To their surprise, they found that one barrel was of a very small bore, though at the muzzle each bore was of uniform size—large enough for an ounce ball. But not over six inches from the muzzle—just far enough in to escape detection by the eye—there was a shoulder or off-set; and it was there that the small bore began, and from this were thrown those small copper bullets with that unerring certainty that made the Unknown Marksman a mortal terror.

But, where were his bullets? They had searched his pockets and mail-bag, and in fact every place where a bullet might be concealed, but they found nothing save a few large leaden balls.

Edith Mount, who had watched their movements and listened to their remarks of wonder and surprise, now came forward and suggested that Goliah cut one of the leaden bullets, found on Running Deer's person, in two. This he did, and to the surprise of all, a small copper bullet was found in the center of the leaden one.

Had Spencer been alive and seen this, he would have known where those bullets were molded—that the man whom he saw engaged with bellows, forge and crucible, the night he was upon Castle Island, was casting those lead-covered missiles of death.

It appeared that the rifle had been made expressly for these men's scheme of vengeance, and the idea of the lead-covered copper bullet adopted to elude detection—the lead being cut away when a small bullet was wanted. Whenever he had occasion to use the rifle for any other purpose than that of vengeance, he could load the large-bored barrel with a full-sized ball.

The whole outfit was ingenious as its owner's vengeance had been terrible.

Old Smiley, the Mennonite teacher, turned out to be Edith Mount's brother; and what part he took in avenging the deaths of the Bullrush tragedy, will never be known to anyone save the actual participants and God, for Edith's lips were sealed.

That Sandy Gray and Gershom Bland were also accomplices of Running Deer, there was not a doubt in the minds of any; for it will be remembered that the deadly rifle was once in the possession of Sandy Gray, who claimed he had traded for it; but took the opportunity to trade back again the night they happened in Pokahgan's camp. As further evidence of their complicity in the matter, they both resigned their commissions of mail-carriers soon after Running Deer's death, and left for parts unknown.

Castle Island had been the head-quarters of this terrible League of Vengeance, and that Edith was fully cognizant of all that was going on, there was little doubt, for she, too, had a vengeance to gratify. But, be this as it may, the mystery of the Unknown Marksman was solved, and whatever of wrong poor Edith had to do with it, she rendered an account of the same at the bar of God soon after the great mystery had been exposed to the world. The suffering, excitement, exposure and privations of the past two months had proved too much for her delicate strength; and when all was over, and she was about to begin life anew, the relapse brought on nervous prostration, and she took sick of lung fever, and after a lingering illness, died in the arms of him to whom she had plighted her first love, Frank Ballard.

Goliah Strong at once removed his family from the Blue Marsh to their old home; then went back to complete his labors in the Michigan woods. In company with Old Wolverine and a number of police officers they proceeded to Camp Spencer and made several arrests of persons known to be engaged in the counterfeiting business, of which Spencer had been their leader. They also visited the Shingle-Weavers' camp south of the settlement and arrested all three of the men there, whom Goliah had found out were engravers and printers, instead of Shingle-Weavers. With these men, they took several plates of fine workmanship; and in fact, all the tools that a thoroughly organized gang of counterfeiters could possibly need.

From the Shingle-Weavers' camp the detectives went to the big tree left standing in the clearing back of Camp Spencer—the same tree that had aroused Strong's suspicion the night they followed Spencer to the retreat of his engravers. In the tree, which was without an external blemish, the counterfeiters had chiseled out a large square hole in which was inserted a drawer. The outside of this drawer had been so ingeniously covered with the bark of the block cut away, that one would never have noticed it, had they not been looking for something of the kind. In this secret repository they found several hundred dollars of spurious bills.

With his prisoners and the evidence of their crimes, Goliah returned to South Haven, and there arresting James Trimble, Spencer's partner in rascality and crime, he took all aboard a steamer, and carrying them to Chicago, delivered them into the hands of justice. And thus, one of the most notorious bands of counterfeiters that ever infested the north-west was broken up and its agents punished.

Nattie Darrall returned home from his bee-hunting excursion, the happiest boy in ten States; for he had not only received the papers from Ed Mathews that made him rich, but he had also received the promise from Ida Zane, that she would some day—when both had grown older—be his wife.

At the next general term of probate court, he presented the notes and mortgage that had been stolen years before from his father, and with the evidence of Goliah Strong, he had no difficulty in obtaining a decree of foreclosure; and in a short time the vast tract of timber-land owned by Spencer and Trimble was sold to satisfy the judgment, now amounting to nearly a hundred thousand dollars.

Nattie did not forget the friends who had aided him in recovering the papers; and when he found himself in possession of great wealth, he bestowed a handsome little sum upon Ed and Frank, as well as Goliah and Old Wolverine. Thus ended the bee-hunters' career in the wild woods of Michigan; and although they often recount the days and nights of peril and adventure that they had passed while there, and brood over them as over a dream, they never had cause to regret that they had once been bee-hunters.

Old Wolverine is still one of the permanent "fixtures" of the Michigan woods; and as he is no mythical being, and age is gradually sapping away the vitality of his once powerful form, we may expect, at any time, to hear of his being, in the language of his own familiar song, called away—

"Over the hills and far away."

THE END.

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